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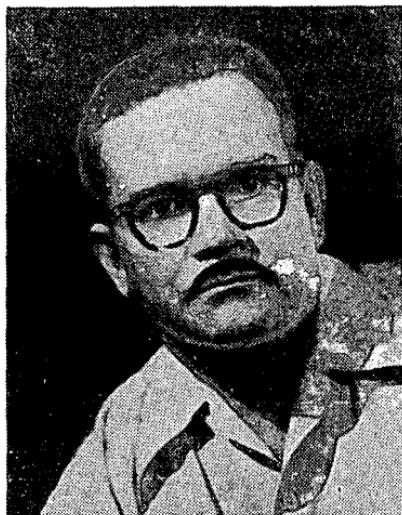
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# ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

FALL-  
WINTER  
**1975**

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"

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ELLERY QUEEN



# Rex Stout

## A Window for Death

*At the beginning of the case of the dead uranium millionaire Nero Wolfe was a reluctant dragon of a detective—only because, as everyone knows, Nero Wolfe hates to work. But then the great Nero's curiosity was aroused, and when that happens Nero does go to work.*

*The curiosity-arouser? Two hot-water bags. But let Nero speak for himself: "It's inexplicable; and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister . . . It's more than mysterious, it's preposterous."*

*"A Window for Death," complete in this anthology, is one of Rex Stout's most baffling and most ingeniously constructed short novels. So we need hardly warn the epicures among you: beware of an appetizing plate of red herring . . .*

### Detectives: **NERO WOLFE** and **ARCHIE GOODWIN**

Nero Wolfe, behind his desk, sat glaring at the caller in the red leather chair. I was swiveled with my back to my desk, ready with my notebook, not glaring.

Wolfe's glare was partly on general principles, but more because David R. Fyfe had not phoned for an appointment. You might think it didn't matter. There was the office, on the ground floor of the old brownstone house on West 35th Street. There was Wolfe in the chair he loved, sharpening his penknife on the old oilstone he kept in a drawer. There was I, Archie Goodwin, eager to earn my pay by serving his slightest whim, within reason. There was Fritz Brenner in the kitchen, doing the luncheon dishes, set to bring beer if the buzzer went one short and one long. There was Theodore Horstmann up in the plant rooms on the roof, nursing the orchids. And there in the red leather chair was a guy who wanted to hire a detective or he wouldn't have come. But for

him and others like him, Fritz and Theodore and I would have been out looking for jobs, and God only knows what Wolfe would have been doing. But Wolfe was glaring at him. He should have phoned for an appointment.

He sat forward in the red leather chair, not touching the back, his narrow shoulders sagging and his pale narrow face looking the worse for wear. I would have guessed his age at 50, but most people look older than they are when forced by circumstances to go to a private detective. In a tired, careful voice, after giving his name and address and his occupation—head of the English Department at Audubon High School in the Bronx—he said he wanted Wolfe to investigate a confidential family matter.

"Marital?" Wolfe made a noise that went with the glare. "No."

He shook his head. "It isn't marital. I am a widower, with two children in high school. It's about my brother Bertram—his death. He died Saturday night of pneumonia. It will have to be—I'll have to explain about it."

Wolfe sent me a glance and I met it. If he let Fyfe explain he might have to work, and he hated to work, especially when the bank balance was healthy. But I tightened my lips a little as I met his glance, and he sighed and went back to the customer. "Do so," he muttered.

Fyfe did so, and I took it down. His brother Bertram had suddenly appeared in New York a month ago, unannounced, after an absence of 20 years, and taken an apartment in the Churchill Towers, and communicated with his family—his older brother, David, who was doing the explaining, his younger brother, Paul, and his sister, Louise, now Mrs. Vincent Tuttle. They had all been glad to see him again after so many years, including Tuttle, the brother-in-law, and had also been glad to learn that he had hit a jackpot—not David's word, his was "bonanza"—by finding and hooking onto a four-mile lode of uranium ore near a place called Black Elbow somewhere in Canada. It is always nice to know that a member of the family has made out well.

So they welcomed Bertram, their brother Bert, and along with him a young man named Johnny Arrow who had accompanied him from Canada and was living with him in the Churchill Towers apartment. Bert had been fairly fraternal and had shown an interest in old memories and associations; he had even asked Paul, who was a real-estate broker, to get a line on the purchase of the old house in Mount Kisco where they had all been born and

spent their childhood. Bert was back as one of the family.

Ten days ago he had invited them to dine with him on Saturday the sixth, and afterward go to the theater, but on Thursday he had been put to bed with pneumonia. He refused to go to a hospital and insisted that they should dine at the Churchill as planned and use the theater tickets; so they gathered at his apartment late Saturday afternoon and carried out the program, returning to the apartment after the show for a champagne snack.

That is, four of them did—sister Louise and her husband, Johnny Arrow from Canada, and brother David himself. Younger brother Paul had maintained that Bert shouldn't be left alone with the nurse, and had stayed at the apartment. When the four returned after the show they found a situation. Paul had gone and the nurse had a torn uniform and marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists. She had phoned the doctor to send another nurse and intended to leave as soon as her replacement came. Sister Louise resented some of her remarks and ordered her to leave at once, and she went.

Louise phoned the doctor and told him she would stay until another nurse came. Johnny Arrow disappeared, leaving only David and Louise and her husband, Vincent Tuttle, on the scene; and after David had looked in at Bert on his sickbed, sound asleep under the morphine the nurse had given him by doctor's orders, he departed for home.

Louise and Tuttle went to bed in a room that was presumably Johnny Arrow's, but were not yet asleep when a buzz took Tuttle to the door of the apartment, where he found Paul. Paul said he had been assaulted by Johnny Arrow down in the men's bar, and had an assortment of bruises to show as evidence. Arrow had been escorted away by two cops. Paul thought his jaw was broken and possibly a rib or two, and he didn't feel like driving home to Mount Kisco, so they put him on a couch in the living room, and in thirty seconds he was snoring, and after another glance in at the door of Bert's room Louise and Tuttle went back to bed.

Around six in the morning they were aroused by Paul. He had aroused himself by tumbling off the couch, had gone to look at Bert, and had found him dead. They phoned down to the desk for a doctor because Bert had insisted on having the old family doctor he knew in his boyhood, and they didn't want to wait for him to get in from Mount Kisco. Of course they phoned him too, and he got there later.

Wolfe was fidgeting. He fidgets by making circles the size of a dime with a fingertip on his chair arm. "I trust," he grumbled, "that the doctors will now justify your calling on me and this long recital. Or at least one of them."

"No, sir." David Fyfe shook his head. "They found nothing wrong. My brother died of pneumonia. Dr. Buhl—that's the one from Mount Kisco, Dr. Frederick Buhl—he signed the death certificate, and my brother was buried Monday, yesterday, in the family plot. Of course the nurse having gone made the—uh—the situation a little embarrassing, but no serious question was raised."

"Then what the devil do you want of me?"

"I'm about to tell you." Fyfe cleared his throat, and when he went on his voice was more careful than ever. "After the funeral yesterday that man Arrow asked us to come to the apartment at eleven o'clock this morning to hear the will read, and of course we went. Louise brought her husband along. There was a lawyer there, a man named McNeil who had flown down from Montreal, and he had the will. It had all the usual legal rigmarole, but what it amounted to was that Bert left his whole estate to Paul and Louise and me, and made that man Arrow the executor. It put no value on the estate, but from things Bert had said I would have thought his uranium holdings were worth upwards of five million dollars, possibly twice that."

Wolfe stopped fidgeting.

"Then," Fyfe went on, "the lawyer took another document from his brief case. He said it was a copy of an agreement he had drawn up a year ago for Bertram Fyfe and Johnny Arrow. He read it. There was a preamble about their prospecting together for uranium for five years and their joint discovery of the Black Elbow lode, and the gist of it was that if either of them died the whole thing would become the property of the survivor, including any assets that had been acquired by the deceased through income from the mining property. That wasn't the phraseology, it was all very legal, but that's what it meant."

"As soon as he read it Johnny Arrow spoke up. He said that Bert had possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the Black Elbow uranium, and that therefore it was now legally his property, including large sums on deposit in Canadian banks, but that when Bert came to New York he had had some thirty or forty thousand dollars transferred to a New

York bank, and he, Arrow, didn't intend to claim what was left of it. That would be the estate and we could have it."

David made a mild little gesture. "He was being generous, I thought, since he could have claimed that too: We asked the lawyer a few questions and then left and went out to a restaurant for lunch. Paul was raging. My brother Paul is impulsive. He wanted to go to the police and tell them Bert had died in suspicious circumstances and ask them to investigate. His theory was that when Arrow saw that Bert was getting reconciled with his family he was afraid he might make large gifts to us, possibly even a share of the mining properties, and Arrow couldn't claim them under the agreement if Bert died, so he decided he had to die now.

"Vincent Tuttle, my sister's husband, objected that even if the theory was sound Arrow hadn't acted on it, since two competent doctors had agreed that Bert had died of pneumonia, and Louise and I agreed with him, but Paul was stubborn. He hinted that he knew something we didn't know, but then he always liked to be a little mysterious. He stuck to it that we should go to the police, and we argued about it, and finally I suggested a compromise. I suggested that I get Nero Wolfe to investigate, and if you decided there was sufficient reason to call in the police we would join with Paul in doing so, and if you decided there wasn't, Paul would forget it. Paul said all right, he would accept your decision, so that's what I want you to do. I know you charge high fees, but this shouldn't require any great—uh—I mean it shouldn't be too complicated. It's a fairly simple problem, isn't it?"

Wolfe grunted. "It could be. There was no autopsy?"

"No, no. Good heavens, no."

"That should be the first step, but it's too late now, without the police. Before burial an examination could have been made merely to satisfy medical curiosity, but exhumation needs authority. I take it that you want me to investigate, and reach a decision, without attracting the attention of the police."

Fyfe nodded emphatically. "That's right. That's exactly right. We don't want any scandal . . . any rumors going around . . ."

"People rarely do," Wolfe said drily. "But you may be hiring me to start one. You understand, of course, that if I find evidence of skulduggery it will not be in your sole discretion whether to bury it or disclose it. I will not engage to suppress grounds, if I find any, for a suspicion of homicide. If my investigation results in a

reasonable assumption that you have yourself committed a crime, I am free to act as I see fit."

"Of course." Fyfe tried to smile, with fair success. "Only I know I have committed no crime, and I doubt if anyone has. My brother Paul is a little impetuous. You'll need to see him, naturally, and he'll want to see you."

"I'll have to see all of them." Wolfe's tone was morose. Work. He grabbed at a straw. "But under the circumstances I must ask for a retainer as a token of good faith. Say a check for a thousand dollars?"

It wasn't a bad try, since a head of a high-school English Department with two children might not have a grand lying around loose, and the deal would have been off, but Fyfe didn't even attempt to haggle. He did gulp, and gulped again after he got out a check folder and pen and wrote, and signed his name. I got up and accepted the check when he offered it and passed it across to Wolfe.

"It's a little steep," Fyfe said—not a complaint, just a fact—"but it can't be helped. It's the only way to satisfy Paul. When will you see him?"

Wolfe gave the check a look and put it under a paperweight, a chunk of petrified wood that had once been used by a man named Duggan to crack his wife's skull. He glanced up at the wall clock; in twenty minutes it would be four o'clock—time for his afternoon session in the plant rooms.

"First," he told Fyfe, "I need to speak with Dr. Buhl. Can you have him here at six o'clock?"

David looked doubtful. "I could try. He would have to come in from Mount Kisco, and he's a busy man. Can't you leave him out of it? He certified the death and he's thoroughly reputable."

"It's impossible to leave him out. I must see him before dealing with the others. If he can be here at six, arrange for the others to come at six thirty. Your brother and sister, and Mr. Tuttle, and Mr. Arrow."

Fyfe stared. "Good heavens," he protested, "not Arrow! Anyway, he wouldn't come." He shook his head emphatically. "No. I won't ask him."

Wolfe shrugged. "Then I will. And it might be better—yes. It may be protracted, and I dine at seven thirty. If you can arrange for Dr. Buhl to be here at nine, bring the others at half past. That will give us the night if we need it. Of course, Mr. Fyfe, there are

several points I could go into with you now—for instance, the situation you found when you returned to the apartment from the theater, and your brother Bertram's reconciliation with his family—but I have an appointment; and besides, they can be explored more fully this evening. For the present, please give Mr. Goodwin the addresses and phone numbers of everyone involved."

He moved his vast bulk forward in his chair to pick up the penknife and start rubbing it gently on the oilstone. He had undertaken that job, and by gum he intended to finish it.

"I described the situation," Fyfe said in a sharper tone. "I invited the inference that Paul had stayed at the apartment in order to approach the nurse. I wholly disapprove of his method of approaching women. I have said he is impetuous."

Wolfe was feeling the knife's edge tenderly with a thumb.

"What is the point," Fyfe asked, "about the reconciliation?"

"Only that you used the word." Wolfe was honing again. "What needed to be reconciled? It may be irrelevant, but so are most points raised in an investigation. It can wait till this evening."

Fyfe was frowning. "It's an old sore," he said, the sharpness gone and his voice tired again. "It may not be irrelevant, because it may partly account for Paul's attitude. Also I suppose we're oversensitive about any threat of scandal. Pneumonia is a touchy subject with us. My father died of pneumonia twenty years ago, but it was thought by the police he was murdered. Not only by the police. He was in a ground-floor bedroom in our house at Mount Kisco, and it was January, and on a stormy night, extremely cold, someone raised two windows and left them wide-open. I found him dead at five o'clock in the morning. Snow was drifted a foot deep on the floor and there was snow on the bed. My sister Louise, who was caring for him that night, was sound asleep on a couch in the next room. It was thought that some hot chocolate she drank at midnight had been drugged, but that wasn't proved. The windows weren't locked and could have been opened from the outside—in fact, they must have been. My father had been a little shrewd in some of his real-estate dealings and there were people in the community who had been—uh—who were not fond of him."

Fyfe repeated the mild little gesture. "So you see, there is the coincidence. Unfortunately, my brother Bert—he was only twenty-two then—had quarreled with my father and was not living at home. He was living in a rooming house about a mile away."

and had a job in a garage. The police thought they had enough evidence to arrest him for murder and he was tried, but the evidence certainly wasn't conclusive, because he was acquitted. Anyhow he had an alibi. Up to two o'clock that night he had been playing cards with a friend—Vincent Tuttle, who later married my sister—in Tuttle's room in the rooming house, and it had stopped snowing shortly after two, and the windows must have been opened long before it stopped snowing. But Bert resented some of our testimony on the witness stand—Paul's and Louise's and mine—though all we did was tell the truth about things that were known anyway—for example Bert's quarrel with my father. Everybody knew about it. The day after he was acquitted Bert left town and we never heard from him, not a word for twenty years. So that's why I used the word 'reconciled'."

Wolfe had returned the knife to his pocket and was putting the oilstone in the drawer.

"Actually," Fyfe said, "Arrow was wrong when he stated that Bert possessed nothing that had not been acquired with income from the uranium. Bert never claimed his share of our father's estate, and they couldn't find him, and we have never applied for its distribution. His one-quarter share was around sixty thousand dollars, and now it's more than double that. Of course Paul and Louise and I will get it now, but honestly it will give me no pleasure. I may say frankly, Mr. Wolfe, that I am sorry Bert came back. It reopened an old sore, and now his death, and the way it happened, and Paul acting like this . . ."

It was one minute to four. Wolfe was pushing his chair back and leaving it. "Yes, indeed, Mr. Fyfe," he concurred. "A nuisance alive and an affliction dead. Please give Mr. Goodwin the necessary information, and phone when you have made the arrangements for this evening."

He headed for the door.

A little research into backgrounds is often a help, even in cases that apparently don't call for it, and after Fyfe left I made a few phone calls to various quarters, getting a skimpy crop of useless information. David had taught at Audubon High School for twelve years and had been head of the English Department for four. Paul's real-estate agency in Mount Kisco was no whirlwind but was seemingly solvent. Vincent Tuttle's drug store, also in Mount Kisco, was his own, and was thought to be doing fine. David had

had no address or phone number for the nurse, Anne Goren, but Wolfe wanted them all, and I found her in the Manhattan book, listed as an RN. The first two times I dialed her number I got a busy signal, and the next three times no answer.

Nor could I get Johnny Arrow. Calls to the Churchill Towers go through the Churchill switchboard, and I left word for him to call, and made half a dozen tries. Finally, just before Fritz announced dinner, I got Tim Evarts, assistant house dick—security officer to you—and asked him a few discreet questions. The answers were both for and against. For, the rent was paid on the de luxe Towers apartment, and the bar and restaurant staff all liked Johnny Arrow, especially his tipping standards. Against, Arrow had slugged a guy in the bar Saturday night, repeatedly and persistently, and had been removed by cops. Tim said that technically it had been a fine performance, but the Churchill bar wasn't the place for it.

Fyfe had phoned that the arrangements had been made. At nine o'clock, when Dr. Frederick Buhl arrived, Wolfe and I were through in the dining room, having put away around four pounds of salmon mousse, Wolfe's own recipe, and a peck of summer salad, and were back in the office. The doorbell took me to the hall, and as I switched on the stoop light what I saw through the one-way glass panel of the front door gave me a double surprise. Dr. Buhl, if it was he, was no doddering old worn-out hick doc; he was an erect, gray-haired, well-dressed man of distinction. And with him was a young female having her own personal points of distinction, discernible even by a swift glance at a distance.

I went and opened up. He moved aside for her to enter and then followed, saying that he was Dr. Buhl and had an appointment with Nero Wolfe. No hat covered his crown of distinguished gray hair; so there was nothing for the rack, and I led them down the hall and into the office. Inside he halted to dart a glance around, then crossed to Wolfe's desk and said aggressively, "I'm Frederick Buhl. David Fyfe asked me to come. What is all this nonsense?"

"I don't know," Wolfe murmured. He keeps his voice down to a murmur after a meal, unless goaded. "I've been hired to find out. Sit down, sir. The young woman?"

"She's the nurse. Miss Anne Goren. Sit down, Anne."

She was already sitting, in a chair I had moved up for her. I was making revisions in my opinion of Paul Fyfe. Probably he had been too impetuous, but the temptation had been strong; and

the marks on her neck and cheeks and wrists must have been superficial since no scars were visible. Also a nurse's uniform is much more provocative than the blue cotton print she was wearing, with a bolero jacket to match. Even in the cotton print, I could have—but skip it. She was there on business. She thanked me for the chair, coldly, no smile.

Dr. Buhl, in the red chair, demanded, "Well, what is it?"

Wolfe murmured, "Didn't Mr. Fyfe tell you?"

"He told me that Paul thought there was something suspicious about Bert's death and wanted to go to the police, and David and Louise and Vincent Tuttle couldn't talk him out of it, and they agreed to get you to investigate and accept your decision, and he had talked with you, and you insisted on seeing me. I think it quite unnecessary. I am a reputable physician, and I signed a death certificate."

"So I understand," Wolfe murmured. "But if my decision is to be final it should be well fortified. I have no thought of challenging the propriety of your issuance of the death certificate. But there are a few questions. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?"

"Saturday evening. I was there half an hour, and left at twenty minutes past seven. The others were there, having dinner in the living room. He had refused to go to a hospital. I had put him under an oxygen tent, but he kept jerking it off, he wouldn't have it. I couldn't get him to leave it on and neither could Miss Goren. He was in considerable pain, or said he was, but his temperature was down to a hundred and two. He was a difficult patient. He couldn't sleep, and I told the nurse to give him a quarter of a grain of morphine as soon as the guests had gone, and another quarter grain an hour later if that didn't work—he had had half a grain the night before."

"Then you returned to Mount Kisco?"

"Yes."

"Did you think he might die that night?"

"Of course not."

"Then when you got word Sunday morning that he was dead, weren't you surprised?"

"Of course I was." Buhl flattened his palms on the chair arms. "Mr. Wolfe, I am tolerating this as a favor to David Fyfe. You are being inane. I'm sixty years old. I've been practicing medicine for more than thirty years, and fully half of my patients have surprised me one way or another—by bleeding too much or too little,

by getting a rash from taking aspirin, by refusing to show a temperature with a high blood count, by living when they should die, by dying when they should have lived. That is the universal experience of general practitioners. Yes, Bertram Fyfe's death was a surprise, but it was by no means unprecedented. I examined the body with great care a few hours after he died and found nothing whatever to make me question the cause of death. So I issued the certificate."

"Why did you examine the body with great care?" Wolfe was still murmuring.

"Because the nurse had left him in the middle of the night—had been forced to leave—and I hadn't been able to get a replacement. The best I could do was to arrange for one to report at seven in the morning. Under those circumstances I thought it well to make a thorough examination for the record."

"And you are completely satisfied that pneumonia was the cause of death, with no contributing factors?"

"No, of course not. Complete satisfaction is a rarity in my profession, Mr. Wolfe. But I am satisfied that it was proper and correct to issue the certificate, that it was consistent with all the observable evidence, that—in layman's language—Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia. I am not quibbling. Long ago a patient of mine died of pneumonia, but it was a cold winter night and someone had opened the windows of his room and let the storm in. But in this case it was a hot summer night and the windows were closed. The apartment was air conditioned, and I had instructed the nurse to keep the regulator at eighty in that room because a pneumonia patient needs warmth, and she had done so. In the case I mentioned, windows open to a winter storm were certainly a contributing factor, but in this case there was no evidence of any such factor."

Wolfe nodded approvingly. "You have covered the point admirably, Doctor, but you have also raised one. The air conditioner. What if someone moved the regulator, after the nurse's departure, to its lowest extreme? Could it have cooled the room sufficiently to cause your patient to die when you expected him to live?"

"I would say no. I considered that possibility. Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle have assured me that they did not touch the regulator and that the room's temperature remained equable, and anyway on so hot a night the conditioner couldn't have cooled the air to that extent. I wanted to be satisfied on that point, since no nurse had

been there, and I arranged with the hotel to check it Sunday night, in that room. After the regulator had been at its extreme for six hours the temperature was sixty-nine—too low for a pneumonia patient, even one well covered, but certainly not lethal."

"I see," Wolfe murmured. "You did not rely on the assurance of Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle."

Buhl smiled. "Is that quite fair? I relied on them as wholly as you rely on me. I was being thorough. I am thorough."

"An excellent habit. I have it too. Did you have any suspicion, with or without reason, that someone might have contrived to help the pneumonia kill your patient?"

"No. I was merely being thorough."

Wolfe nodded. "Well." He heaved a deep sigh, and when it had been disposed of turned his head to focus on the nurse. During the conversation she had sat with her back straight, her chin up, and her hands folded in her lap. I had her profile. There are not many female chins that rate high both from the front and from the side.

Wolfe spoke. "One question, Miss Goren—or two: Do you concur with all that Dr. Buhl has told me—all that you have knowledge of?"

"Yes, I do." Her voice was a little husky, but she hadn't been using it.

"I understand that while the others were at the theater Paul Fyfe made advances to you which you repulsed. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Did that cause you to neglect your duties in any way? Did it interfere with your proper care of your patient?"

"No. The patient was sound asleep, under sedation."

"Have you any comment or information to offer? I have been hired by David Fyfe to determine whether anything about his brother's death warrants a police inquiry. Can you tell me anything whatever that might help me decide?"

Her eyes left him to go to Buhl, then came back again. "No, I can't," she said. She stood up. Of course nurses are expected to rise from a chair without commotion, but she just floated up. "Is that all?"

Wolfe didn't reply, and she moved. Buhl got to his feet. But when she was halfway to the door Wolfe called, considerably above a murmur, "Miss Goren, one moment!" She turned to look at him. "Sit down, please," he invited her.

She hesitated, glanced at Buhl, and came back to the chair. "Yes?" she asked.

Wolfe regarded her briefly, then turned to Buhl. "I could have asked you before," he said, "why you brought Miss Goren. It seemed quite unnecessary, since you were fully prepared and qualified to deal with me, and surely it was inconsiderate to drag her into a matter so delicate. It was a reasonable inference that you expected me to ask some question that she could answer and you couldn't, so you had to have her with you. Evidently I didn't ask it, but I did provoke her. When I asked if she could tell me anything she looked at you. Manifestly she is withholding something and you know what it is. I can't pump it out of you, with no bribe to offer and no threat to brandish, but my curiosity has been aroused and must somehow be satisfied. You may prefer to satisfy it yourself."

Buhl, his elbow on the chair arm, was pulling at his fine straight nose with a thumb and forefinger. He let his hand drop. "You're not just a windbag," he said. "You're quite correct. I expected you to bring up something that would require Miss Goren's presence, and I'm astonished that you didn't. I wanted to consider it, but I'm perfectly willing to bring it up myself. Haven't they mentioned the hot-water bags to you?"

"No, sir. I have been told nothing about hot-water bags."

"Then I suppose Paul—but it doesn't matter what I suppose. Tell him about it, Anne."

"He already knows about it," she said scornfully. "One of them hired him."

"Tell me anyway," Wolfe suggested, "for comparison."

"Very well." Her lovely chin was up. "I was keeping two hot-water bags on the patient, one on each side of his chest, and changing the water every two hours. I changed it just before I left—before Mrs. Tuttle ordered me to leave. Sunday evening Paul Fyfe came to my apartment—I have a little apartment on Forty-eighth Street with a friend, another nurse. He said that when he found his brother was dead that morning he pulled the covers down and the hot-water bags were there, but they were empty, and he took them and put them in the bathroom. Later his sister, Mrs. Tuttle, saw them and called him to look at them and said the nurse had neglected to fill them, and she was going to report it to the doctor. He asked if she hadn't changed the water herself before she went to bed, and she said no, she hadn't thought it was

## A WINDOW FOR DEATH

necessary because the nurse had changed it just before she left."

Miss Goren's voice wasn't husky now. It was clear and firm and positive. "He said he had told his sister that when he took the bags to the bathroom he had emptied the water out of them. He said he told her that on the spur of the moment, to keep her from reporting me to the doctor, but he had realized since that perhaps he shouldn't have told her that because the empty bags might have had something to do with his brother's death, and he asked me to go and have dinner with him so we could talk it over. We were standing at the door of the apartment, I hadn't let him in, and I slammed the door in his face. The next day, yesterday, he phoned three times, and last evening he came to the apartment again, but I didn't open the door. So he told his brother David and got him to come to you. How does it compare?"

Wolfe was frowning at her. "Pfui," he said, and gave her up and turned to Buhl. "So that's it," he growled.

Buhl nodded. "Miss Goren phoned to tell me about it Sunday evening, and again yesterday, and again last night. Naturally, since her professional competence was in question. Do you wonder that I expected you to bring it up?"

"No, indeed. But I hadn't heard of it. How much chance is there that Miss Goren did in fact fail to put water in the bags?"

"None whatever, since she says she put it in. She trained at the Mount Kisco Hospital, and I know her well. I always use her, if she's available, when I have a patient in New York. That can be eliminated."

"Then either Paul Fyfe is lying or someone took the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. Which seems senseless. Certainly it could have had no appreciable effect on the patient. Could it?"

"No. Appreciable, no." Buhl passed a palm over his distinguished gray hair. "But it could have an effect on Miss Goren's professional reputation, and I feel some responsibility. I put her on the case. You haven't asked me for an opinion, but I offer one. I think Bertram Fyfe died of pneumonia, with no contributing factors except those he contributed himself—his refusal of the oxygen tent, perhaps his capricious insistence on having them come to dinner despite his illness. He was a headstrong boy, and apparently he never changed. As for the hot-water bags I think Paul Fyfe is lying. I don't want to slander him, but the vagaries of his conduct with women are common knowledge in his home com-

munity. A woman who strikes his fancy doesn't merely attract him; he is obsessed. It would be consonant with his former-known behavior if, seeing the bags in the bed, he had formed the notion of acquiring a weapon to use on Miss Goren and took the bags to the bathroom and emptied them."

"Then," Wolfe objected, "he was an ass to tell his sister he had emptied them."

Buhl shook his head. "Only to sidetrack her. He could tell Miss Goren he had done her that service and at the same time could threaten, at least tacitly, to disclose her negligence. I don't say he wasn't an ass; obsessed people usually are. I merely say that I think he told his sister the truth and told Miss Goren a lie. I think he emptied the bags himself. I understand he will be here this evening, with the others, and I ask you to let them know that any attempt to charge Miss Goren with an act of negligence will be deeply resented by me and strongly opposed. I will advise her to bring an action for slander and I will support it. If you prefer that I tell them myself—"

The doorbell rang. I got up and went to the hall for a look, and stepped back in.

"They're here," I told Wolfe. "David and two men and a woman."

He looked up at the clock. "Ten minutes late. Bring them in."

"No!" Anne Goren was on her feet. "I won't! I won't be in a room with them! Dr. Buhl, please!"

I must say I agreed with her. I wasn't obsessed, but I absolutely agreed. After a second's hesitation Buhl did too, and told Wolfe so. Wolfe looked at her and decided to make it unanimous.

"All right," he conceded. "Archie, take Miss Goren and Dr. Buhl to the front room, and after the others are in here let them out."

"Yes, sir." As I went to open the door to the front room the bell rang again. Paul being impetuous. If he had known who was there he would probably have bounded through the glass panel.

The way it looked to me, as I sat at my desk and got out my notebook after ushering the newcomers in and letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, an investigation of a death that had surprised the doctor was about to deteriorate into an inquiry about a real-estate agent's methods of courtship—not the sort of job that Wolfe would ever consider worthy of his genius, fee or no fee, and I was looking forward to it.

In appearance Paul was not up to his billing. He was a good eight inches shorter than me, broad and a little pudgy, and probably thought he looked like Napoleon—and maybe he did a little, or would have without the shiner (left eye) and the bruises on both sides of his swollen jaw. Evidently Johnny Arrow used both fists. Paul and the Tuttles were on chairs lined up in front of Wolfe's desk, leaving the red leather chair to David.

Louise was taller than either of her brothers, and better-looking. For a middle-aged woman she wasn't a bad sight at all, though a little bony, and her hair was too short. As for her husband, Tuttle, he was simply short of hair. His shiny dome, rising to a peak, made such details as eyes and nose and chin unimportant. You had to concentrate to take them in.

When I came back and sat after letting Buhl and Anne Goren out, Wolfe was speaking. ". . . and Dr. Buhl stated that in his opinion your brother died of pneumonia, with no suspicious circumstances. Since he had already certified the death, that leaves us where we were." He focused on Paul. "I understand that you maintain that the police should be asked to investigate. Is that correct?"

"Yes. You're damn right it is." He had a baritone and gave it plenty of breath.

"And the others disagree." Wolfe's head moved. "You disagree, sir?"

"As I told you." David looked and sounded tireder than ever. "Yes, I disagree."

"And you, Mrs. Tuttle?"

"I certainly do." She was a word clipper, with a high thin voice. "I don't believe in asking for trouble. Neither does my husband." Her head jerked sideways. "Vince?"

"That's right, my dear," Tuttle rumbled. "I always agree with you, even when I don't. This time I do."

Wolfe went back to Paul. "Then it seems to be up to you. If you go to the police what do you tell them?"

"I tell them plenty." The ceiling light made Paul's shiner look worse than it really was. "I tell them that when Dr. Buhl left Saturday evening he told us that Bert's condition was satisfactory and we could go and enjoy the play, and a few hours later Bert was dead. I tell them that that guy Arrow was making a play for the nurse, and she was giving him the eye, and he could have had an opportunity to get at her stuff and substitute something for the

morphine she was going to shoot into Bert. Dr. Buhl told us he was giving morphine. I tell them that Arrow stands to rake in several million bucks that he never would have got a smell of as long as Bert was alive. I tell them that Arrow saw that Bert was getting on with us, one of the family again, and he didn't like it and showed he didn't."

Paul stopped to press gently at his jaw with fingertips. "It hurts me to talk," he said "That damn hoodlum. Look, I'm no prince. The way you're looking at me, you might be asking am I my brother's keeper, and hell no. I didn't get along any too well with Bert when we were kids, and I hadn't seen him for twenty years, so what. I might as well tell you what. A murderer can't collect on his crime, and if Arrow killed him that agreement is out the window and it will all be in Bert's estate, and it will be ours. That's obvious, so why not say it? I won't have to tell the police that because they'll know it."

"That's no way to talk, Paul," David said sharply.

"That's right," Tuttle agreed. "It certainly isn't."

"Oh, can it," Paul told his brother-in-law. "Who are you?"

"He's my husband," Louise snapped at him. "He could teach you a lot of things if you were teachable."

All in the family. Wolfe took over. "I concede," he told Paul, "that you might stir the police into curiosity, but surmise is not enough. Have you anything else to tell them?"

"No. I don't need anything else."

"For me you do." Wolfe leaned back, pulled in a bushel of air, and let it out again. "Let's see if we can find something. What time did you arrive at your brother's apartment Saturday evening?"

"Saturday afternoon around five o'clock." The bottom half of Paul's face was suddenly contorted, and I thought he was having a spasm until I realized he was merely trying to grin, which is a problem with a sore jaw. "I get it," he said, "where was I at nine minutes to six on August sixth? Okay. I left Mount Kisco at a quarter to four, alone in my car, and drove to New York. My first stop was at Schramm's on Madison Avenue to buy two quarts of their mango ice cream to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party. Then I drove to Fifty-second Street and parked the car, which can be done on a Saturday afternoon, and walked to the Churchill, arriving at the apartment a little after five. I went early because I had spoken with the nurse on the phone and liked

her voice, and I thought I might get acquainted with her before the others came. Not a chance. That guy Arrow had her in the living room, telling her about prospecting for uranium. Every ten minutes or so she would sneak in for a look at her patient and then come back for more about prospecting. Then Dave came, and then Louise and Vince, and we were just starting dinner around a quarter to seven when Dr. Buhl came. Want more?"

"You might as well finish."

"Anything you say. Buhl was in with Bert about half an hour and when he left—I told you what he told us. We not only ate, we drank, and maybe I overdid it a little. I thought it wouldn't be right to leave the nurse alone with Bert, and when the others left to go to the show I stayed. I thought if the nurse liked to hear about prospecting she might like to hear about other things too, but apparently not. After a little—oh, some remarks back and forth—she went in Bert's room and shut the door and locked it. She told my sister later that I banged on the door and yelled at her that if she didn't come out I'd break the door down, but I don't remember it that way. Anyhow, by that time Bert was dead to the world with morphine, if it was morphine. She did come out and we talked and I may have touched her, but the marks on her that she showed them when they got back from the theater—she must have done that herself. I wasn't that drunk, I was just a little high. Finally she got at the phone and said if I didn't leave she would call down to the desk and tell them to send someone up, and I beat it. Want more?"

"Go ahead."

"Righto. I went down to the bar and sat at a table and had a drink. Two or three drinks. Something made me remember the ice cream I had put in the refrigerator in the apartment, and I was deciding whether to go up and get it when suddenly Arrow was there telling me to stand up. He grabbed my shoulder and yanked me up and told me to put up my hands and then he hauled off and socked me. I don't know how many times he hit me, but look at me. Finally they blocked him off and a cop came."

"I edged out of the bar and took an elevator up to the apartment, and Vince let me in. That part is a little hazy, but I know they put me on a couch because I woke up by falling off it, only I wasn't really awake. I had some kind of idea about being hurt and wanting to see the nurse, and I went to Bert's room and in. The window curtains were drawn, and I turned on a light and

went to the bed. He looked dead, with his mouth open, and I pulled the covers down and felt for his heart and he felt dead. There were two hot-water bags there, one on each side of him. They looked empty, and I picked one up and it was empty, and I thought to myself, she was careless because I made her sore and that won't do, and the other one was empty too, and I took them to the bathroom before I went—"

"Paul!" It was Louise, staring at him. "You told me you emptied them!"

"Sure I did." He grinned at her, or tried to. "I didn't want you to report her to the doctor. What the hell, can't a man be gallant?" He returned to Wolfe. "You said I had to tell you something else. Okay, that's something else. Like it?"

"So you lied to Louise," Tuttle rumbled.

"Or you're lying now," David said, not tired at all. "You have said nothing about this to me."

"Of course not. Damn it, I was being gallant."

They all pitched in, cawing at one another, all in the family. With Louise's high soprano, Paul's baritone, Tuttle's rumble, and David's falsetto, it made quite a quartette.

Wolfe shut his eyes and tightened his lips; took it up to a point, and then crashed the sound barrier: "Jabber! Stop it, please." He picked on Paul. "You, sir, speak of gallantry. I didn't mention that Miss Goren was here with Dr. Buhl. She was, and she told me of your visits to her apartment and your phone calls, so we'll leave gallantry out, but there are two points at issue. First, the fact: did you find the bags empty or did you empty them?"

"I found them empty. I told my sister—"

"I know what you told your sister, and the reason you give. Taking it that you found the bags empty, surely it is frivolous to offer that as an item for the police. Dr. Buhl told me that even if Miss Goren neglected to put hot water in them, which he doesn't believe, it would have had no appreciable effect on the patient, so it has no appreciable effect on me. That is the second point. But your conjecture that something was substituted for the morphine—that might indeed have an effect if you can give it any support. Can you?"

"I don't have to. Let the police see if they can."

"No. That won't do. A conjecture is well enough for private exploration, but using it to put a man under official suspicion of homicide is inadmissible. For example, it would not be a fatuous

conjecture if I guessed that you, not knowing of the agreement between your brother and Mr. Arrow, and assuming that you would inherit a third of his fortune, killed him; but certainly I would not proceed—”

“You’d better not,” Paul cut in. “I did know about the agreement.”

“Yes? Who told you?”

“I did,” David said. “Bert told me and I told Paul and Louise.”

“You see?” Wolfe turned a hand over. “There goes my conjecture. If I were stubborn I could of course still cling to it, guessing that you had anticipated it and conspired to meet it, knowing that your dead brother can’t testify, but that would be witness if I had no single fact in support.” He shook his head at Paul. “I’m afraid you’re trying to open fire without ammunition. But I have been engaged to investigate, so I won’t scrimp it.” He went to David. “I know how you feel about this, Mr. Fyfe, so I don’t expect anything significant from you, but a few questions won’t hurt. What do you know about the morphine?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all, except that Dr. Buhl told us he had left some with the nurse to be given to Bert after we left.”

“Did you go in your brother’s room after Dr. Buhl left?”

“Yes, we all did—Paul and Louise and Vincent and I. We told him the dinner was excellent and we were sorry he couldn’t be with us at the theater.”

“Where was Mr. Arrow?”

“I don’t know. I believe he had said something about changing his shirt.”

“Did he go in your brother’s room after Dr. Buhl left?”

“I don’t know.” David shook his head. “I’m sure I don’t know.”

Wolfe grunted. “Not that that would indict him. How about later, when you returned from the theater? Did he go in your brother’s room then?”

“I don’t think so. If he did I didn’t see him.” David was frowning. “I told you about the situation. The nurse was very upset and said she had phoned Dr. Buhl to send a replacement. When she told us what had happened Arrow left—that is, he left the apartment. Then my sister and the nurse had some words and my sister told the nurse to go, and after she went my sister phoned Dr. Buhl and told him she and her husband would stay until a replacement came. Shortly after that I went home. I live in Riverdale.”

"But before leaving you went to your brother's room?"

"Yes."

"How was he then?"

"He was sound asleep, making some noise breathing, but he seemed all right. When Louise phoned Dr. Buhl he told her that Bert had had half a grain of morphine and would probably not wake before morning."

Wolfe's head moved. "Mrs. Tuttle. You have heard what your brothers have said. Have you any corrections or additions?"

She was having a little trouble. Her mouth was working and her hands, in her lap, were clasped tight. She met Wolfe's look but didn't reply, until suddenly she cried, "It's not my fault! No one is going to blame it on me!"

Wolfe made a face. "Why should they, madam?"

"Because they did about my father! Do you know about my father?"

"I know how he died. Your brother told me."

"Well, they blamed me then—everybody did! Because I was taking care of him and I slept and didn't go to his room and find the open windows! They even asked me if I put a drug in my chocolate so I would sleep! A twenty-four-year-old girl doesn't have to take drugs to sleep!"

"Now, my dear," Tuttle patted her shoulder. "That's all in the past, it's all forgotten. There were no open windows in Bert's room Saturday night."

"But I sent the nurse away." She was talking to Wolfe. "And I told Dr. Buhl I would be responsible, and I went to bed and went to sleep without even looking at the hot-water bags, and they were empty." She jerked her head around to her younger brother. "Tell the truth, Paul, the real truth. Were the bags empty?"

He patted her too. "Take it easy, Lou. Sure they were empty, on my word of honor as a Boy Scout, but that didn't kill him and I never said it did."

"No one's blaming you," Tuttle assured her. "As for your going to sleep, why shouldn't you? It was after one o'clock, and Dr. Buhl had said Bert would sleep all night. Believe me, my dear, you're making a mountain out of a molehill."

Her head went down and her hands came up to cover her face and her shoulders began to tremble. To Wolfe a lady in distress is a female having a fit, and if she starts yowling he gets to his feet faster than seems practical for his bulk and makes for the door

and the elevator. Louise wasn't yowling. He eyed her sharply and warily for a moment, decided she probably wouldn't go off, and went to her husband.

"About going to sleep, Mr. Tuttle, you said after one o'clock. That was after Paul had got you out of bed to let him in?"

"Yes." He had a soothing hand on his wife's arm. "It took a little time, hearing what Paul had to say and getting him settled on the couch. Then we took a look in Bert's room and found him asleep, and went to bed."

"Did you sleep right through until Paul woke you around six in the morning?"

"I think my wife did. She was tired out. She may have stirred a little, but I don't think she awoke. I went to the bathroom a couple of times, I usually do during the night, but except for that I slept until Paul called us. The second time I went and opened the door of Bert's room, and didn't hear anything, so I didn't go in. Why? Is this important?"

"Not especially." Wolfe darted a glance at Louise, alert to danger, and back at him. "I am thinking of Mr. Arrow and trying to cover all the possibilities. Of course he had a key to the apartment, so might have entered during the night, performed an errand if he had one, and left again. Might he not?"

Tuttle considered. To watch him consider I had to make an effort to forget his shiny dome and concentrate on his features. It would have been simpler if his eyes and nose and mouth had been on top of his head. "Possibly," he conceded, "but I doubt it. I'm not a very sound sleeper and I think I would have heard him. And he would have had to go through the living room and Paul was there on the couch, but of course Paul was pretty well gone."

"I was *all* gone," Paul asserted. "He would have had to slug me again if he wanted me to notice him." He looked at Wolfe. "It's an idea. What kind of an errand?"

"No special kind. I'm merely asking questions. —Mr. Tuttle, when did you next see Mr. Arrow?"

"That morning, Sunday morning, he came to the apartment around nine o'clock, just after Dr. Buhl arrived."

"Where had he been?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask him and he didn't say. It was—well, it was in the presence of death. He asked us a great many questions, some of them impertinent, I thought, but under those circumstances I made allowances."

Wolfe leaned back, closed his eyes, and lowered his chin. The brothers sat and looked at him. Tuttle turned to his wife, smoothing her shoulder and murmuring to her, and before long she uncovered her face and lifted her head. He got a nice clean handkerchief from his breast pocket, and she took it and dabbed around with it. There was no sign of any tear gullies down her cheeks.

Wolfe opened his eyes and moved them from left to right and back again. "I see no likely advantage," he pronounced, "in keeping you longer. I had hoped it would be possible to reach a decision this evening"—he leveled at Paul—"but your conjecture about the morphine merits a little inquiry—by me, that is, and of course discreet. It would be no service to expose you to an action for slander."

His eyes went to David and back across to Tuttle. "By the way, I haven't mentioned that Dr. Buhl asked me to let you know that if Miss Goren is charged with negligence he will advise her to bring such an action, and he will support it. She maintains that before she left she put hot water in the bags and he believes her. You will hear further from me, probably not later than—"

The doorbell rang. When we have company in the office Fritz usually answers it, but I had a hunch, which I frequently do, and I got up and, passing behind the customers' chairs, reached the hall in time to head Fritz off on his way to the front. The stoop light was on and through the panel I saw a stranger—a square-shouldered specimen about my age and nearly my size. Telling Fritz I'd take it, I went and opened the door to the extent allowed by the chain of the bolt and asked through the crack, "Can I help you?"

A soft drawly voice slipped through. "I guess so. My name's Arrow. Johnny Arrow. I want to see Nero Wolfe. If you open the door that'll help."

"Yeah, but I'll have to ask him. Hold it a minute." I shut the door, got a piece of paper from my pocket and wrote Arrow on it, returned to the office, crossed to Wolfe's desk, and handed him the paper. The visitors were out of their chairs, ready to leave.

Wolfe glanced at the paper. "Confound it," he grumped, "I thought I was through for the day. But perhaps I can—very well."

I will concede that I can be charged with negligence, since I knew what had happened Saturday night in the Churchill bar, but I deny that it was intentional. I have as much respect for the

furniture in the office as Wolfe has, or Fritz. I just didn't stop to consider, as I went to the front door and let the uranium prince in and ushered him to the office and stepped aside to observe expressions on faces. When, the instant he caught sight of Paul Fyfe, Arrow went for him I was too far away and therefore one of the yellow chairs got busted. The consolation was that I saw a swell demonstration of how Paul had got his jaw bruised on both sides.

Arrow jabbed with his left, hard enough to rock him off balance, and then swung his right and sent him some six feet crashing onto the chair. As he was reaching to yank him up, presumably to attend to the other eye, I got there and put my arm around his neck from behind, and my knee in his back. Tuttle was there, trying to grab Arrow's sleeve. David was circling around, apparently with the notion of getting in between them; which is rotten tactics. Louise was making shrill noises.

"Okay," I told them, "just back off. I've got him locked." Arrow tried to wriggle, found that the only question was which would snap first, his neck or his back, and quit. Wolfe spoke, disgusted, saying they had better go. Paul had scrambled to his feet and for a second I thought he was going to take a poke at Arrow while I held him, but David had his arm, pulling him away. Tuttle went to Louise and started her out, and David got Paul moving.

At the door to the hall David turned to protest to Wolfe. "You shouldn't have let him in, you might have known." When they were all in the hall I unlocked Arrow and went to see them out, and as they crossed the threshold I wished them good night, but only David wished me one in return.

Back in the office Johnny Arrow was sitting in the red leather chair, working his head gingerly forward and back to check on his neck. I may have been a little thorough, but with a complete stranger how can you tell?

I sat with my back to my desk and took him in as an object with assorted points of interest. He was a uranium millionaire, the very newest kind. He was a chronic jaw-puncher, no matter where. He knew a good-looking nurse when he saw one, and acted accordingly. And he had been nominated as a candidate for the electric chair. Quite a character for one so young. He wasn't bad-looking himself, unless you insist on the kind they use for cigarette ads. His face and hands weren't as rough and weathered as I would have expected of a man who had spent five years in

the wilderness pecking at rocks, but since finding Black Elbow he had had time to smooth up some.

He quit working his head and returned my regard with a stare of curiosity from brown eyes that had wrinkles at their corners from squinting for uranium. "That was quite a squeeze," he said in his soft drawl, no animosity. "I thought my neck was broken."

"It should have been," Wolfe told him severely. "Look at that chair."

"Oh, I'll pay for the chair." He got a big roll of lettuce from his pants pocket. "How much?"

"Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill." Wolfe was scowling. "My office is not an arena for gladiators. You came, I suppose, in response to the message we left for you?"

He shook his head. "I didn't get any message. If you sent it to the hotel I haven't been there since morning. What did it say?"

"Just that I wanted to see you."

"I didn't get it." He lifted a hand to massage the side of his neck. "I came because *I* wanted to see *you*." He emphasized a word by stretching it. "I wanted to see that Paul Fyfe too, but I didn't know he was here, that was just luck. I wanted to see him about a trick he tried to work on a friend of mine. You know about the hot-water bags."

Wolfe nodded. "And me?"

"I wanted to see you because I understand you're fixing it up that I killed my partner, Bert Fyfe." The brown eyes had narrowed a little. Evidently they squinted at other things besides uranium. "I wanted to ask if you needed any help."

Wolfe grunted. "Your information is faulty, Mr. Arrow. I have been hired to investigate and decide whether any of the circumstances of Mr. Fyfe's death warrant a police inquiry, and for that I do need help. There is no question of 'fixing it up,' as you put it. Of course your offer of help was ironic, but I do need it. Shall we proceed?"

Arrow laughed. No guffaws; just an easy little chuckle that went with the drawl. "That depends on how," he said. "Proceed how?"

"With an exchange of information. I need some and you may want some. First, I assume that you got what you already have from Miss Goren. If I'm wrong, correct me. You must have talked with her since four o'clock this afternoon. No doubt she thought she was reporting events accurately, but if she gave you the im-

pression that I'm after you with malign intent she was wrong. Do you care to tell me whether the information that brought you here came from Miss Goren?"

"Certainly it did. She had dinner with me. Dr. Buhl came to the restaurant for her to bring her here."

If I'm giving the impression that he was eager to cooperate with Wolfe I am wrong. He was merely bragging. He was jumping at the chance to tell somebody, anybody, that Miss Goren had let him buy her a dinner.

"Then," Wolfe said, "you should realize that her report was *ex parte*, though I don't say she deliberately colored it. I will say this, and will have it typed and sign it if you wish, that so far I have found no shred of evidence to inculpate you with regard to Bertram Fyfe's death. Let's get on to facts. What do you know about the hot-water bags? Not what anyone has told you, not even Miss Goren, but what do you know from your own observation?"

"Nothing whatever. I never saw them."

"Or touched them?"

"Of course not. Why would I touch them?" The drawl never accelerated. "And if you're asking because that Paul Fyfe says he found them empty, what has that got to do with facts?"

"Possibly nothing. I'm not a gull. When did you last see Bertram Fyfe alive?"

"Saturday evening, just before we left to go to the theater. I went in just for a minute."

"Miss Goren was there with him?"

"Yes, of course."

"You didn't see him when you returned from the theater?"

"No. Do you want to know why?"

"I already know. You found what Mr. David Fyfe calls a situation, and you went out again, abruptly. I have inferred that you went to look for Paul Fyfe. Is that correct?"

"Sure, and I found him. After what Miss Goren told us I would have spent the night finding him, but I didn't have to. I found him down in the bar."

"And assaulted him."

"Sure I did. I wasn't looking for him to shine his shoes." The easy little chuckle rippled out, pleasant and peaceful. "I guess I ought to be glad a cop stepped in because I was pretty mad." He looked at me with friendly interest. "That was quite a squeeze you gave me."

"What then? I understand you didn't return to the apartment."

"I sure didn't. Another cop got mad. They put handcuffs on me and one of them took me to a station house and locked me up. I wouldn't tell them who it was I had hit or why I hit him, and I guess they were trying to find him to make a charge. Finally they let me use a phone and I got someone to send a lawyer. Next morning I got to the apartment and found that Paul Fyfe there, and that Tuttle and his wife, and Bert was dead. That doctor was there too."

"Of course it was a shock to find him dead."

"Yes, it was. It wouldn't have been if I had killed him, is that it?" Johnny Arrow chuckled. "If you're really straight on this, if you're not trying to fix me up, let me tell you something, mister. Bert and I had been knocking around together for five years, some pretty rough going. We never starved to death, but we came close to it. Nobody ever combed our hair for us. When we found Black Elbow it took a lot of hard fast work to sew up the claims, and neither of us could have swung it alone. That was when we had a lawyer put our agreement in writing, so if something happened to one of us there wouldn't be some outsiders mixing in and making trouble. It had got so we liked to be together, even when we rubbed. That was why I came to New York with him when he asked me to. There was nothing in New York I wanted. We could handle all our business matters in Black Elbow and Montreal. I sure didn't come here with him to kill him."

Wolfe was regarding him steadily. "Then he didn't come to New York on business?"

"No, sir. He said it was a personal matter. After we got here he got in touch with his sister and brothers, and I had the idea something was eating him from away back. He went to Mount Kisco a few times and took me along. We rode all around the place in a Cadillac. We went to the house where he was born and went all through it—there's an Italian family living there now. We went and had ice cream sodas at Tuttle's drug store. We went to see a woman that ran a rooming house he had lived in once, but she had gone years ago. Just last week he found out she was living in Poughkeepsie and we drove up there."

It took him quite a while to get that much out because he never speeded up. "I seem to be talking a lot," he said, "but I'm talking about Bert. For five years I didn't do much talking except to him, and now I guess I want to talk *about* him."

He cocked his head to consider a moment, and then went on. "I wouldn't want to be fixed up, and I wouldn't want to fix anyone else up, but I guess that was too vague what I said about something eating Bert from away back. He told me a little about it when we were sitting under a rock one day up in Canada. He said if we really hit it he might go back home and attend to some unfinished business. Do you know how his father died and how he was tried for murder?"

Wolfe said he did.

"Well, he told me about it. He said he had never claimed his share of the inheritance because he didn't want any part of the mess he had run away from, and if you knew Bert that wouldn't surprise you. He said he had always kidded himself that he had rubbed it out and forgotten it, but now that it looked as if we might hit big he was thinking he might go back and look around. And that's what he did. If he had anyone in particular in mind he never told me, but I noticed a few things. When he told his family what he was doing he watched their faces. When he told them he was getting a complete transcript of the testimony at his trial for murder they didn't like it. When he told them he had been to see the woman that ran the rooming house they didn't like that either. It looked to me as if he was trying to give them an itch to scratch."

His eyes narrowed a little, showing crinkles. "But don't get the idea I'm trying to fix anybody up. The doctor says Bert died of pneumonia, and I guess he's a good doctor. I just didn't want to leave it vague about why Bert came to New York. Got any more questions?"

Wolfe shook his head. "Not at the moment. Later perhaps. But I suggested an exchange of information. Do you want any?"

"Now I call that polite." Arrow sounded as if he really appreciated it. "I guess not." He rose from the chair and stood a moment. "Only you said you've found no evidence to—what was that word?"

"Inculpate."

"That's it. So why don't you just move out? That's what Bert and I did when we found a field was dead, we moved out."

"I didn't say it was dead." Wolfe was glum. "It's not, and that's the devil of it. There is one mysterious circumstance that must somehow be explained before I can move out."

"What is it?"

"I've already asked you about it and you dispute it. If I broach it again with you I'll be better armed. Mr. Goodwin will send you a bill for the chair when we know the amount. Good evening, sir."

He wanted more about the mysterious circumstance, but didn't get it. Nothing doing. When he found the field was dead he moved out, and I went to the hall to open the door for him. After he crossed the sill he turned. "That sure was a squeeze."

In the office Wolfe was leaning back with his eyes closed, frowning. I stowed the broken chair in a corner, put the others back in place, straightened up my desk for the night, locked the safe, then approached him. "What's the idea, trying to make him mad? If there's a mysterious circumstance, I must have been asleep. Name it."

He muttered, without opening his eyes, "Hot-water bags."

I stretched and yawned. "I see. You force yourself to go to work, find there is no problem, and make one up. Forget it. Settle for the grand, which isn't too bad for eight hours' work, and vote no. Case closed."

"I can't. There is a problem." His eyes opened. "Who in the name of heaven emptied those bags, and why?"

"Paul did. Why not?"

"Because I don't believe it. Disregarding his repeated declarations here this evening, though they were persuasive, consider the scene. He enters his brother's room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down and finds the hot-water bags empty. He turns to go and call his sister and brother-in-law, but it occurs to him that the empty bags are a weapon that may be used on Miss Goren. He doesn't want them to come to his sister's attention, so before he calls her he puts the bags in the bathroom. You accept that as credible?"

"Certainly I do, but—"

"If you please, I'll use the 'but.' But try it this way. He enters his brother's room and finds him dead. He pulls the covers down to feel the heart. The bags are there, with water in them. Seeing them he conceives a stratagem—and remember, he is under the shock of just having found a corpse where he expected, presumably, to find his living brother. He conceives, on the spot, before calling the others, the notion of taking the bags to the bathroom and emptying them, so he can go at some future time to Miss Goren and tell her he found them empty; and he proceeds to do so. Do you accept that as credible?"

"It's a little fancy," I admitted, "as you describe it."

"I describe it as it must have happened, if it happened. I say it didn't. He noticed the bags only because they *were* empty; if they had been full he probably wouldn't have been aware of them at all, there in a sickbed, now a deathbed. Doubtless there are men capable of so sly an artifice at such a moment, but he is not one of them. I am compelled to assume that he found the bags empty, and where does that leave me?"

"I'd have to look it over." I sat down.

"You won't like it." He was bitter. "I don't. If I am to preserve my self-esteem, a duty that cannot be delegated, I have got to explore it. Is Miss Goren at fault? Did she put the bags in the bed empty?"

"No, sir. I'm thinking of marrying her. Besides, I don't believe it. She's competent, and no competent trained nurse could possibly pull such a boner."

"I agree. Then here we are. Around midnight, just before she left, Miss Goren filled the bags with hot water and put them in the bed. Around six in the morning Paul Fyfe found the bags there in the bed, but they were empty. Someone had removed them, emptied them, and put them back. Justify it."

"Don't look at me. I didn't do it. Why should I justify it?"

"You can't. To suppose it was done with murderous design would be egregious. It's inexplicable; and anything inexplicable on a deathbed is sinister, especially the deathbed of a millionaire. Before I can even consider the question of who did it I must answer the question why?"

"Not necessarily," I argued. "I'll switch. Settle for the grand, but don't vote no. Vote yes and let Paul turn it over to the cops. That will fill the order."

"Pfui. Do you mean that?"

I gave up. "No. You're stuck. The cops would only decide the nurse had left the bags empty and wouldn't admit it, and Johnny Arrow would start in slugging the whole damn Homicide Squad from Inspector Cramer right down the line." Struck with a sudden suspicion I eyed him. "Is this just a buildup? Do you already know why the bags were emptied, or think you do, and you want me to realize how brilliant you are?"

"No. I am lost. I can't even grope. It's more than mysterious, it's preposterous." He looked up at the clock. "It's bedtime, and now I must take this monstrosity to bed with me. First, though, some

instructions for you for the morning. Your notebook, please?"

Wednesday morning, after having breakfast in the kitchen with Fritz, as usual, while Wolfe was having his up in his room, also as usual, I got started on the instructions. They were simple, but it proved to be not so simple to carry them out. The first and main item was to phone Dr. Buhl and arrange for him to be at the office at eleven o'clock, when Wolfe would come down from the plant rooms, and to bring Anne Goren with him.

To begin with, I didn't get hold of him until nearly noon. From nine o'clock until ten all I got was his answering service and the information that he was out making calls. I left word for him to ring me, but he didn't. From ten o'clock on I got his office nurse. She was courteous and sympathetic, in a subdued way, the first three times I phoned, but after that got a little brusque. The doctor, still out making the rounds, had been told of my request to be rung, and she couldn't help it if he had been too busy.

When he finally called I couldn't very well ask him to arrive with Miss Goren at eleven, since it was already a quarter to twelve, so I suggested three o'clock, and got a flat no. Neither three nor any other hour. He had told Wolfe all he had to tell about the death of Bertram Fyfe, but if Wolfe wished to speak with him on the phone he could spare two minutes. Consulted, Wolfe said no, not on the phone. Deadlock.

The upshot was that after lunch I got the car from the garage and drove the 40 miles, up the West Side Highway and out the Sawmill River Parkway, to Mount Kisco, and found that Buhl's office was in a big white house on a big green lawn. I had been told he would see me after his p.m. office hours, which were from two to four, but there were still five patients in the waiting room when I arrived, so I had a nice long visit with the usual crop of magazines before the nurse, who had been with him at least 60 years, passed me through.

Buhl, seated at a desk, looking tired but still distinguished, told me abruptly, "I have calls to make and I'm late. What is it now?"

I can be abrupt too. "A question," I said, "raised by a relative of the deceased. Did someone substitute something else for the morphine? Mr. Wolfe doesn't want to pass it on to the cops without giving it a look himself, but if you would prefer—"

"Morphine? You mean the morphine administered to Bert?"

"Yes, sir. Since the question has been—"

"That damn fool. Paul, of course. It's absurd. Substituted when and by whom?"

"Not specified." I sat down, uninvited. "But Mr. Wolfe can't just skip it, so he'd appreciate a little information. Did you give the morphine to the nurse yourself?"

From the look he gave me I expected to be told to go climb a tree, preferably one about ready to topple, but he changed his mind and decided to get it over with. "The morphine," he said, "came from a bottle in my case. I took two quarter-grain tablets from the bottle and gave them to the nurse and told her to give one to the patient as soon as the dinner guests had left and the other one an hour later if necessary. She has told me that the tablets were administered as directed. To suppose that something was substituted for them is fantastic."

"Yes, sir. Where did she keep them until the time came to administer them?"

"I don't know. She is a competent nurse and completely reliable. Do you want me to ask her?"

"No, thanks, I will. Could there be any question about your bottle of morphine? Could it have been tampered with?"

"Not possibly. No."

"Had you got a fresh supply recently—I mean, put a fresh supply in that bottle?"

"No. Not for two weeks at least. Longer, probably."

"Would you say there is any chance—say, one in a million—that you took the tablets from the wrong bottle?"

"No. Not one in a billion." His brows went up. "Isn't this a little superfluous? From what David told me yesterday I gathered that Paul's suspicions were directed at the man who came to New York with Bert—Mr. Arrow."

"Maybe so, but Mr. Wolfe is being thorough. He's a thorough man." I stood up. "Many thanks, Doctor. If you wonder why I drove clear up here just for this, Mr. Wolfe is also careful. He doesn't like to ask questions about an unexpected death on the phone."

I left him, went back out to the car, and rolled off. The route back to the parkway took me through the center of town and on a red brick building on a corner, a very fine location, I saw the sign: TUTTLE'S PHARMACY. That was as good a place as any for a phone, so I parked down the block and walked back to it. Inside, it was quite an establishment—up-to-date, well furnished, well

stocked, and busy, with half a dozen customers on stools at the fountain and three or four others scattered around. One of them, at a counter in the rear, was being waited on by the proprietor himself, Vincent Tuttle. I crossed to a phone booth, dialed the operator, asked for the number I knew best, and in a moment had Wolfe's voice in my ear.

"From a booth," I told him, "in Tuttle's pharmacy in Mount Kisco. Quoting Dr. Buhl, the idea of a switch on the morphine is absurd and fantastic. As for its source, he gave two quarter-grain tablets to the nurse from his private stock. Do I proceed?"

"No." It was a growl, as always when he was interrupted in the plant rooms. "Or rather, yes, but first some further inquiry in Mount Kisco. After you left I considered the question of the hot-water bags and I may have hit on the answers—or I may not. At any rate it's worth trying. See Mr. Paul Fyfe and ask him what happened to the ice cream. You will remember—"

"Yeah, he bought it at Schramm's to take back to Mount Kisco for a Sunday party, and took it to Bert's apartment and put it in the refrigerator. You say you want to know what happened to it?"

"I do. See him and ask him. If he accounts for it, check him thoroughly. If he doesn't, see if Mr. or Mrs. Tuttle can, and check them. If they can't, ask Miss Goren when you see her about the morphine. If she can't, find Mr. Arrow and ask him. I want to know what happened to that ice cream."

"You certainly do. Tell me why so I'll have some idea what I'm after."

"No. You are not without discretion, but there's no point in subjecting it to an unnecessary strain."

"You're absolutely right and I appreciate it deeply. Tuttle's right here, so shall I see him first?"

He said no, to see Paul first, and hung up. As I left the booth and the store and headed for the address of Paul's real-estate office, down the street a block, I was looking around inside my skull for a connection between Schramm's famous mango ice cream and the hot-water bags in Bert Fyfe's bed, but if it was there I couldn't find it. Which was just as well, if there really was one, because I hate to overwork my discretion.

I found Paul on the second floor of an old wooden building, above a grocery store. His office was one small room, with two desks and some scarred old chairs which had probably been allotted to him when the family split up the paternal estate. Seated at

the smaller desk was a woman with a long thin neck and big ears, about twice Paul's age, who was perfectly safe even with him. Paul, at the other desk, didn't get up as I entered.

"You?" he said. "You got something?"

I looked at the woman who was fiddling with some papers. He told her she could go and she merely plunked a weight down on the papers, got up, and left. No amenities at all.

When the door had closed behind her I answered him. "I haven't got something, I'm just after something. Mr. Wolfe sent me up here to ask Dr. Buhl about the morphine and to ask you about the ice cream. The last we heard it was still in the refrigerator in your brother's apartment. What happened to it?"

"Well, for God's sake." He was staring at me, at least with his good eye. It was hard to tell what the one with the shiner was doing. "What the hell has that got to do with anything?"

"I don't know. With Mr. Wolfe I often don't know, but it's his car and tires and gas and he pays my salary, so I just humor him. It's the simplest and quickest way for you too, unless there's something about the ice cream you'd rather keep to yourself."

"There's not a damn thing about the ice cream."

"Then I won't have to bother to sit down. Did you bring it to Mount Kisco for the Sunday party you mentioned?"

"No. I didn't come back to Mount Kisco until Sunday night."

"But you were in New York again the next day, Monday, for the funeral—and to call on Miss Goren again. Did you get the ice cream then?"

"Look," he said, "we'll leave Miss Goren out of this."

"That's the spirit," I said warmly. "I'm all for gallantry. But what happened to the ice cream?"

"I don't know and don't give a damn."

"Did you see it or touch it at any time after you put it in the refrigerator Saturday afternoon?"

"I did not. And if you ask me this is a lot of hooey. I don't know where that fat slob Wolfe got his reputation, but if this is the way he carries on an investi—what's the big rush?"

I had got as far as the door. Turning as I opened it, I said politely, "Nice to see you," and went.

Backtracking to Tuttle's pharmacy I found there had been a turnover of customers, but business was still humming. Tuttle's shiny dome loomed behind a showcase of cosmetics. Catching his eye I crossed over and told him I would like to have a couple of

minutes when he was free, and then went to the fountain and ordered a glass of milk. It was nearly all down when he called to me and beckoned; and I emptied the glass and followed him to the rear, behind the partition. He leaned against a counter and said it was a surprise, seeing me up there.

"A couple of little errands," I told him. "To ask Dr. Buhl about the morphine and to ask you about the ice cream. I've already asked Paul Fyfe. You remember he bought some ice cream at Schramm's Saturday afternoon and took it to Bert's apartment and put it in the refrigerator intending to take it home later."

Tuttle corrected me. "I remember he said he did. What about it?"

"Mr. Wolfe wants to know what became of it. Paul says he doesn't know. He says he never saw it again after he put it in the refrigerator. Did you?"

"I never saw it at all."

"I thought you might have. You and your wife stayed there Saturday night. Sunday morning your brother-in-law was there dead, but even so you must have eaten something. I thought you might have gone to the refrigerator for something for breakfast and you might have noticed the ice cream."

"We had breakfast sent up." Tuttle was frowning. "There was no equipment there for cooking. But now that I think of it I believe Paul mentioned the ice cream Saturday evening at the dinner table. He said something about my ice cream here not comparing with Schramm's and asked why I didn't carry it, and I told him Schramm's products were sold only at their own stores, and anyway it was too expensive. Then I believe my wife mentioned it on Sunday when she got some ice for drinks."

"Did you eat any of it Sunday? Or bring it home with you?"

"No. I said I never saw it. We stayed at the apartment until Monday and came home after the funeral."

"You don't know what became of it?"

"I do not. I suppose it's still there. Unless that man Arrow —why don't you ask him?"

"I will. But first, since I'm here, I guess I'll ask your wife. Is she around?"

"She's at home, up on Iron Hill Road. I can phone her and tell her you're coming or you can speak with her on the phone. But I fail to see what that ice cream has to do with the death of my brother-in-law. What's the connection?"

It seemed to me that that reaction was rather late, but it could have been that since he was only an in-law he didn't want to butt in. "Search me," I told him. "I just run errands. Why don't we get your wife on the phone and I may not have to bother her by going there?"

He turned to a phone on the counter, dialed a number, got it, told his wife I wanted to ask her something, and handed me the transmitter. Louise, not being an in-law, said at once that it was ridiculous to annoy them about something utterly irrelevant, but after a little give and take she told me what she knew, which was nothing. She had never seen the ice cream, though she had probably seen the package. Getting ice from the refrigerator Sunday afternoon she had noticed a large paper bag on the bottom shelf and on returning to the living room had mentioned it to her husband and her brother David, who was there, saying that she thought it was Paul's ice cream and asking if they wanted some. They had declined, and she had not looked into the paper bag. She had no idea what had happened to it.

I thanked her, hung up, thanked her husband, and beat it.

Next stop 48th Street, Manhattan.

In view of the parking situation, or rather the nonparking situation, I have given up using the car for midtown errands, so I left the highway at 46th Street and drove to the garage. I could have phoned a progress report to Wolfe from there, but the house is just around the corner, and I went in person instead of phoning, and got a surprise.

In response to my ring it wasn't Fritz who unbolted the door for me, but Saul Panzer. Saul, with his big nose taking half the available area of his narrow little face, looks at first glance as if he might need help to add two and two. Actually he needs help for nothing whatever. He is not only the best of the four or five operatives Wolfe calls on as required, he's the best anywhere.

"So," I greeted him, "you got my job at last, huh? Please show me to the office."

"Got an appointment?" he demanded, closing the door. Then he followed me down the hall and in.

Wolfe, behind his desk, grunted at me. "Back so soon?"

"No, sir," I told him. "This is just a stopover after leaving the car at the garage. Do you want a report on Paul and Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle before I go on?"

"Yes. Verbatim, please."

With him verbatim means not only all the words but also all the actions and expressions, and I sat down and gave them to him. He is the best listener I know, usually with his elbow on the chair arm, his chin resting on his fist, and his eyes half closed.

When I had finished he sat a moment and then nodded. "Satisfactory. Proceed with the others. Since you won't need the car may Saul use it?"

That wasn't as chummy as it sounds. It had long been understood that the car was his one piece of property on which I had the say.

"For how long?" I inquired.

"Today, tonight, and possibly part of tomorrow."

I looked at my wrist and saw 6:55. "There's not much left of today. Okay. Do I ask for what?"

"Not at the moment. It may be to chase a wild goose. What about your dinner?"

"I don't know." I arose. "If I find the ice cream I can eat that." I headed for the door, turned there to suggest, "Saul can eat the goose," and left.

Flagging a taxi at Tenth Avenue and riding uptown and across 48th Street to the East Side, a part of the thousand-wheeled worm, I admitted that he must have a glimmer of something, since Saul's daily rate was now fifty bucks, quite a bit out of a measly grand; but I still couldn't tie up the ice cream and the hot-water bags. Of course he might be sending Saul on a different trail entirely, and as far as keeping it to himself was concerned I had long ago stopped letting that get on my nerves, so I just tailed it.

The number, on 48th between Lexington and Third, belonged to an old brick four-story that had been painted yellow. In the vestibule two names were squeezed on the little slip by the button next to the top—"Goren" and "Poletti." I pushed the button and when the clicks came, opened the door and entered, and went up two flights of narrow stairs, which were carpeted and clean for a change. Turning to the front on the landing I got a surprise. A door had opened, and standing on the sill was one named neither Goren nor Poletti. It was Johnny Arrow, squinting at me.

"Oh," he said. "I thought maybe it was that Paul Fyfe."

I advanced. "If it's convenient," I said, "I'd like to see Miss Goren."

"What about?"

He needed taking down a peg. "Really," I said. "Only yesterday you were bragging about taking her to dinner. Don't tell me you've already been promoted to watchdog. I want to ask her a question."

For a second I thought he was going to demand to know the question, and so did he, but he decided to chuckle instead. He invited me in, ushered me through an arch into a living room that was well cluttered with the feminine touch, disappeared, and in a minute was back.

"She's changing," he informed me. He sat. "I guess you called me about bragging." His drawl was friendly. "We just got back from the ball game a little while ago and now we're going out for a feed. I was going to phone you this morning."

"You mean phone Nero Wolfe?"

"No, you. I was going to ask you where you bought that suit you had on last night. Now I'd like to ask you where you bought the one you've got on now, but I guess that's a little personal."

I was sympathetic. Realizing that a guy who had spent five years in the bush and who, in New York, found himself suddenly faced with the problem of togging up for a ladylove was in a tough spot, especially if he could scrape up only ten million bucks, I gave him the lowdown from socks to shirts. We were on ornamental vests, pro and con, when Anne Goren came floating in and at sight of her I regretted the steer I had given him. I would have been perfectly willing to feed her myself if I hadn't been working.

"Sorry I made you wait," she told me politely. "What is it?" She didn't sit, and we were up.

"A couple of little points," I said. "I saw Dr. Buhl this afternoon and expected he would phone you, but since you were out he couldn't. First about the morphine he gave you Saturday to be given to Bertram Fyfe. He says he took two quarter-grain tablets from a bottle he had and gave them to you, with directions. Is that correct?"

"Wait a minute, Anne." Arrow was squinting at me. "What's the idea of this?"

"No special idea." I met the brown eyes through the squint. "Mr. Wolfe needs the information to clear this thing up, that's all. —Do you object to giving it, Miss Goren? I asked Dr. Buhl where you kept the tablets until the time came to administer them and he told me to ask you."

"I put them in a saucer and put the saucer on top of the bureau in the patient's room. That is standard procedure."

"Sure. Would you mind going right through it? From the time Dr. Buhl gave you the tablets?"

"He handed them to me just before he left, and after he left I went to the bureau and put them in the saucer. The instructions were to give one as soon as the guests had gone, and one an hour later if it seemed desirable, and that's what I did." She was being cool and professional. "At ten minutes past eight I put one of the tablets in my hypo syringe with one cc. of sterile water and injected it in the patient's arm. An hour later he was asleep but restless, and I did the same with the other tablet. That quieted him completely."

"Have you any reason to suspect that the tablets in the saucer had been changed by someone? That the ones you gave the patient were not the ones Dr. Buhl gave you?"

"Certainly not."

"Look here," Johnny Arrow drawled, "that's a kind of a nasty question. I guess that's enough."

I grinned at him. "You're too touchy. If the cops ever got started on this they'd hammer away at her for hours. Five people have admitted they were in the patient's room after Dr. Buhl left, including you, and the cops would go over that with her forward, backward, sideways, and up and down. I don't want to spoil her appetite for dinner, so I merely ask her if she saw anything suspicious. Or heard anything. You didn't, Miss Goren?"

"I did not."

"Then that's that. Now the other point. You may or may not know that Paul Fyne brought some ice cream to the apartment and put it in the refrigerator. It was mentioned at the dinner table, but you weren't there. Do you know what happened to the ice cream?"

"No. This seems pretty silly. Ice cream?"

"I often seem silly. Just ignore it. Mr. Wolfe wants to know about the ice cream. You know nothing at all about it?"

"No. I never heard of it."

"Okay." I turned to Arrow. "This one is for you too. What do you know about the ice cream?"

"Nothing." He chuckled. "You can get as nasty as you want to with me after that squeeze you put on me last night, but don't try getting behind me. I'm going to keep you right in front."

"From the front I use something else. You remember Paul Fyfe mentioned the ice cream at the dinner table?"

"I guess I do. I had forgotten about it."

"But you never saw it or touched it?"

"No."

"Or heard anything about what happened to it?"

"No."

"Then I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. You'll be doing yourself one too, because it's the quickest way to get rid of me. Where are you going for dinner?"

"I've got a table reserved at Rusterman's."

He was certainly learning his way around, possibly with Anne's help. "That's fine," I said, "because it's only a block out of the way. I want you to take me to the Churchill Towers apartment and let me look in the refrigerator."

It was a good thing I had taken the trouble to brief him on tailors and haberdashers. But for that he would probably have refused, and I would have had to go and persuade Tim Evarts, the house dick, to oblige, and that would have cost both time and money. He did balk some, but Anne put in, saying it would take less time to humor me than to argue with me, and that settled it. It seemed likely that in the years to come Anne would do a lot of settling, and then and there I decided to let him have her. She permitted him to help her get a yellow embroidered stole across her bare shoulders and he got a black homburg from a table. On our way downstairs, and in the taxi we took to the Churchill, I could have coached him on black homburgs, when and where and with what, but with Anne present I thought it advisable to skip it.

The Churchill Towers apartment, on the thirty-second floor, had a foyer about the size of my bedroom, and the living room would have accommodated three billiard tables with plenty of elbow space. There was an inside hall between the living room and the bedrooms and at one end of the hall was a serving pantry, with an outside service entrance. Besides a long built-in stainless-steel counter the pantry had a large warmer cabinet, an even larger refrigerator, and a door to a refuse-disposal chute, but no cooking equipment. Arrow and Anne stood just inside the swinging door, touching elbows, as I went and opened the door of the refrigerator.

The freezing compartment at the top held six trays of ice cubes

and nothing else. On the shelves below were a couple of dozen bottles—beer, club soda, tonic—five bottles of champagne lying on their sides, a bowl of oranges, and a plate of grapes. There was no paper bag big or little, and absolutely no sign of ice cream. I closed the door and opened the door of the warmer cabinet. It contained nothing. I opened the door of the disposal chute, stuck my head in, and got a smell, but not of ice cream.

I turned to the hooker and the hooked. "All right," I told them, "I give up. Many thanks. As I said, this was the quickest way to get rid of me. Enjoy your dinner." They made gangway for me, and I went on out.

When Wolfe had asked me what about dinner I had told him I didn't know, but I knew now. I could be home by 8:30, and that afternoon, preparing for one of Wolfe's favorite hot-weather meals, Fritz had been collecting eight baby lobsters, eight avocados, and a bushel of young leaf lettuce. When he had introduced to them the proper amounts of chives, onion, parsley, tomato paste, mayonnaise, salt, pepper, paprika, pimientos, and dry white wine, he would have Brazilian lobster salad as edited by Wolfe, and not even Wolfe could have it all stowed away by half past eight.

He hadn't. I found him in the dining room, at table, starting on deep-dish blueberry pie smothered with whipped cream. There was no lobster salad in sight, but Fritz, who had let me in, soon entered with the big silver platter, and there was plenty left. Wolfe's ban on business during meals is not only for his own protection but other people's too, including me, so I could keep my mind where it belonged, on the proper ratio of the ingredients of a mouthful. Only after that had been attended to, and my share of the blueberry pie, and we had crossed the hall to the office where Fritz brought coffee, did he ask for a report. I gave it to him. When I had described the climax, the empty refrigerator—that is, empty of ice cream—I refilled our coffee cups.

"But," I said, "if you have simply got to know what happened to it, God knows why, there is still one slender hope. David wasn't on my list. I was going to phone from the Churchill to ask if you wanted me to try him, but I wanted some of that lobster. He was there in the apartment most of Sunday. Shall I see him?"

Wolfe grunted. "I phoned him this afternoon and he was here at six o'clock. He says he knows nothing about it."

"Then that's the crop." I sat and took a sip of coffee. Fritz's coffee is the best on earth. I've done it exactly as he does, but it's not

the same. I took another sip. "So the gag didn't work."

"It is not a gag."

"Then what is it?"

"It is a window for death. I think it is—or was. I'll leave it at that tonight. We'll see tomorrow. Archie."

"Yes, sir."

"I don't like the slant of your eye. If you're thinking of badgering me, don't. Go somewhere."

"Glad to. I'll go have another piece of pie." I took my cup and saucer and headed for the kitchen.

I spent the rest of the evening there, chewing the rag with Fritz, until his bedtime came, eleven o'clock, and then went to the office to lock the safe and tell Wolfe good night, and mounted the two flights to my room. I have been known to feel fairly well satisfied with myself as I get ready for bed after a day's work, but not that night. I had failed to learn the fate of the ice cream. I hadn't the faintest notion where the ice cream came in. I didn't know what a window for death was, though I knew what it had been on a winter night twenty years ago. One of the noblest functions of a man is to keep millionaires from copping pretty girls, and I hadn't moved a finger to stop Arrow.

And the case was no damn good anyhow, with a slim chance of getting any more out of it than the thousand bucks, and with the job limited to deciding whether to call the cops in or not. It was a bad setup all the way. Usually I'm asleep ten seconds after I hit the pillow, but that night I tossed and turned for a full minute before I went off.

The trouble with mornings is that they come when you're not awake. It's all a blur until I am washed and dressed and have somehow made my way down to the kitchen and got orange juice in me; and I'm not really awake until the fourth griddle cake and the second cup of coffee. But that Thursday morning it was accelerated. As I picked up the glass of orange juice I became aware through the blur that Fritz was putting stuff on a tray, and glanced at my wrist.

"My God," I said, "you're late. It's a quarter past eight."

"Oh," he said, "Mr. Wolfe already has his. This is for Saul. He's up with Mr. Wolfe. He said he already had breakfast, but you know how he likes my summer sausage."

"When did he come?"

"About eight o'clock. Mr. Wolfe wants you to go up when you're

through breakfast." He picked up the tray and went.

That did it. I was awake. But that was no good either, because it kept me from enjoying my breakfast. I ate the sausage all right, but forgot to taste it, and I also forgot to put honey on the last cake until it was half gone. I had *The Times* propped on the rack in front of me and pretended to read it, but didn't. It was only 8:32 when I took the last gulp of coffee, shoved my chair back, went to the hall and up one flight to Wolfe's room, found the door open, and entered.

Wolfe, in his yellow pajamas and barefoot, was seated at the table near a window, and Saul, chewing on griddle cake and sausage, was across from him. I approached.

"Good morning," I said coldly. "Shoeshine?"

"Archie," Wolfe said.

"Yes, sir. Suit pressed?"

"This is no time of day for you, I know, but I want to get on with this. Get all of them, including Dr. Buhl. Arrange for them to be here at eleven o'clock, or, if that's impossible, at noon. Tell them I have made my decision and wish to communicate it. If Dr. Buhl is obstinate tell him that the decision, and my reasons for it, will be of considerable professional interest to him and that I feel strongly he should be present. If you phone him immediately you may get him before he starts his day's work. Get him first."

"Is that all?"

"For the present, yes. I need a little more time with Saul." I left them.

It was twenty minutes to twelve when, after a buzz from me on the house phone to tell him they were all there, Wolfe entered, crossed to his desk, greeted them with a nod to the left and one to the right, and sat. On the phone Dr. Buhl and I, after a warm discussion, had settled for eleven thirty, but he was ten minutes late.

I had given David, as the senior member of the family, the red leather chair. Dr. Buhl and Paul and the Tuttles were ranged in front of Wolfe's desk, with Paul next to me. I wanted him handy in case Johnny Arrow got a notion to try another one-two on him. Arrow and Anne were in the rear, side by side, behind Dr. Buhl. Saul Panzer was over by the big globe, in one of the yellow chairs, with his feet, on their toes, pulled back. He always sits like that, even when we're playing pinochle.

Wolfe focused on David. "I was hired," he said, "to inquire into your brother's death and decide whether the police should be asked to investigate. I have decided in the affirmative. It is indeed a case for the police."

They made noises and exchanged glances. Paul turned his head to glare at Johnny Arrow. Louise Tuttle reached for her husband's arm. Dr. Buhl said with authority, "I challenge that decision. As attending physician I demand your reasons for it."

Wolfe nodded. "Of course, Doctor. You are right to make that demand. Naturally the police will want my reasons too, as will the others here, and the simplest way to handle it is for me to dictate my memorandum to Inspector Cramer of the Homicide Squad in your presence." His eyes moved. "It will go better if none of you interrupt. If there are questions after I finish I'll answer them. Archie, your notebook, please. First a letter to Mr. Cramer."

I swiveled to get the notebook and pen, swiveled back, crossed my legs, and rested the notebook on my knee. That way I was facing the audience. "Shoot," I told him.

"Dear Mr. Cramer. I believe you should give your attention to the death of a man named Bertram Fyfe last Saturday night in his apartment at Churchill Towers. In support of that belief I enclose summaries of recent conversations with seven persons, with identifying data; and also a memorandum of the results of the inquiry I have made. Sincerely."

He wiggled a finger at me. "You will prepare the summaries and data, and the memorandum will tell you what should be included and what may be omitted. Start the memorandum on my letterhead, in the usual form. Understood?"

"Right."

He leaned back and took a breath. "The memorandum: Since three of the persons involved, including the deceased, are named Fyfe, I shall use first names. Paul's conjecture regarding the morphine can, I think, be ignored. To suppose that one of those present brought with him lethal tablets of some sort, so similar in appearance to the morphine tablets that they could be substituted without arousing the suspicion of the nurse, would be extravagant indeed. One person, Tuttle, the pharmacist, might have had such tablets or been able to get them or make them, but even so it would have to be assumed that he anticipated an opportunity to substitute them unobserved, also an extravagant assumption."

"It's ridiculous," Dr. Buhl declared. "Any lethal substance in

the pharmacopoeia would have left evidence that I would have detected."

"I doubt that, Doctor. It's an overstatement and I wouldn't advise you to repeat it on the witness stand. I asked you not to interrupt. Archie?"

He wanted the last three words, and I obliged. "'An extravagant assumption.'"

"Yes. Therefore, after routine inquiry by Mr. Goodwin I dismissed jugglery with the morphine as a mere chimera of Paul's spiteful fancy; and indeed I would have dismissed the whole matter on that basis but for one pesky thorn, the hot-water bags. Paragraph.

"I felt compelled to assume, and I am confident you would have agreed in the circumstances, that Paul had found the hot-water bags empty in the bed. That stumped me. After the departure of the nurse, sometime during the night, someone had taken the bags from the bed, emptied them, and put them back. For what conceivable reason? That could not be simply dismissed. I worried it. I sent Mr. Goodwin to Mount Kisco to inquire about the morphine, but that was mere routine. The empty hot-water bags had somehow to be explained.

"I considered them in every possible light, in relation to everything I had been told by all those concerned, and it came to me from two directions at once. The first was as a possible answer to the question—what purpose could empty bags serve in a bed better than full bags? The second was the fact that the Fyfes' father had also died of pneumonia, after someone had opened a window and let the winter cold in to him. A window for death. The question and the fact together brought me an idea. Paragraph.

"I made three phone calls—no, four. I phoned the manager of Schramm's store on Madison Avenue and asked him how he packs two quarts of ice cream on a hot summer afternoon for a customer who wishes to take it some distance in a car. He said the ice cream is put in a cardboard container, and the container is put in a carton on a bed of dry ice, and chunks of dry ice are packed on both sides of it and on top. He said that is their invariable custom. I phoned Dr. Vollmer, who lives in this street, and at his suggestion I phoned an official of a firm which makes dry ice, and learned (a) that several pounds of chunks of dry ice placed under the covering of a pneumonia patient near his chest would certainly lower his temperature materially and probably dangerously; (b) that only a controlled experiment could tell how

dangerously, but it might be fatal; (c) that if the dry ice pressed against the body, even with fabric between, it would burn the skin seriously and leave vivid marks; and (d) that a rubber bag would be perfect, between the ice and the body, for prevention of burning. My fourth—”

“This is fantastic,” Dr. Buhl said. “Perfectly fantastic.”

“I agree,” Wolfe told him. “I had something fantastic to account for. Paragraph. My fourth phone call was to David Fyfe, to ask him to come to see me. The next thing was to learn what had happened to the ice cream. The hypothesis I was forming was bootless if there was evidence that the package had been intact on Sunday, and when Mr. Goodwin phoned from Mount Kisco I asked him to inquire. He did so, of Paul, Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle, Miss Goren, and Mr. Arrow, and they all disclaimed any knowledge of it. He also—”

Louise Tuttle's high thin voice cut in. “That's not true! I told him I saw it in the refrigerator Sunday!”

Wolfe shook his head. “You told him you saw a large paper bag and supposed it contained the ice cream. You didn't look inside the bag. You didn't see the dry ice.” His eyes were holding hers. “Did you?”

“Don't answer that,” Tuttle said abruptly.

“Indeed.” Wolfe's brows went up. “Have we reached a point where questions can't be answered? Did you look inside the bag, Mrs. Tuttle?”

“No, I didn't!”

“Then I'll proceed. Archie?”

I cued him. “It. He also.”

“Yes. He also went to the apartment and looked in the refrigerator and there was no sign of the ice cream. I had myself asked David, and he too had said he knew nothing about it. So my hypothesis now had some flesh and bone. Someone had done something with the ice cream and was lying about it. If the dry ice had been used in the manner suggested, to kill a pneumonia patient, it could never be proven, since dry ice leaves no trace whatever, and my assumption would have to remain an assumption. I had to tackle the problem from another direction, and in fact I had already prepared to do so by asking certain questions of David Fyfe and by sending for Saul Panzer. You know Saul Panzer. Paragraph.

“There had been a few intimations, as you will find in the en-

closed summaries of conversations. Bert Fyfe had been tried for the murder of his father and acquitted. He had resented the testimony of his sister and brothers at the trial, and a major item in his defense was an alibi supplied by his friend Vincent Tuttle, who testified that they had been playing cards at the rooming house where they both had rooms. According to Mr. Arrow, Bert had come to New York not on business but, in Arrow's words, because something was eating him from away back. Arrow himself was of course not a target for suspicion, since he spent Saturday night in a police station.

"And other points you will not miss—the most suggestive being, I think, that Bert not only went to see the landlady he had rented a room from twenty years ago, but when he found she had gone to Poughkeepsie he went there to see her. As you will find from the summary of my conversation with David yesterday afternoon—I'll have to give you that, Archie—Bert had lived in her rooming house only a short time, about two months, hardly a sufficient period to form a bond so strong that after an absence of twenty years he would seek her out so persistently. It was a fair inference that he had some special purpose in mind. Paragraph.

"Other suggestive bits came from David yesterday afternoon in response to questions. His father's relations with his progeny, after the mother's death, had not been cordial. He had ordered Bert to leave and not return. He had been difficult with David and Paul. He had refused permission for his daughter to marry the young man named Vincent Tuttle, then a clerk in the local drug store, and had commanded her not to see him. After his death Louise had married Tuttle and later they had bought the drug store with her share of the inheritance. I had known, of course, from a previous conversation, that the estate had been divided equally among the children."

Wolfe turned his head. "Before I go on, Mr. Tuttle, you might like to answer a question or two. Is it true that in your hearing, the day before he was taken ill, Bert mentioned the fact that he had talked with Mrs. Dobbs, his and your former landlady?"

Tuttle passed his tongue over his lips. "I don't think so," he rumbled. He cleared his throat. "Not that I remember."

"Of course he did, Vince," David declared. He looked at Wolfe. "I told you yesterday."

"I know. I'm testing his memory." He went to Paul. "Do you remember it?"

"Yes," Paul's eyes were on Tuttle. "You're damn right I remember it. He said he was going to see her again as soon as he got well."

Wolfe grunted. "I won't ask you, Mrs. Tuttle." He focused on her husband again. "The other question. Where were you yesterday evening from six to ten?"

It floored him. "Yesterday evening?" he asked lamely.

"Yes. From six to ten. To refresh your memory; Mr. Goodwin came to your store to ask you and your wife about the ice cream and left around five thirty."

"There's nothing wrong with my memory," Tuttle asserted. "But I don't have to account to you for my actions."

"Then you decline to answer?"

"You have no right to ask. It's none of your business."

"Very well. I merely thought you had a right to tell me. Archie?"

Since it had been a long interruption I gave him more than three words. I looked at my notebook. "That the estate had been divided equally among the children."

Wolfe nodded. "Paragraph. As you will see in the summary of my conversation with Mr. Arrow he had told me that Bert had told his relatives that he had gone to see his former landlady; and David verified that yesterday evening and gave me the landlady's name—Mrs. Robert Dobbs. That has just been corroborated by Paul, as I dictate this. Clearly it was desirable to learn what Bert had wanted of Mrs. Dobbs, and since Mr. Goodwin might be needed for other errands I phoned Saul Panzer and sent him to Poughkeepsie. David hadn't known her address, and it took Mr. Panzer a while to locate her.

"It was nearly ten o'clock when he got to the house where she lives with her married daughter. As he approached the door it opened and a man emerged, and as they met, the man stopped him and asked whom he wanted to see. As you know, Mr. Panzer is highly sensitized and extremely discreet. He replied that he was calling on Jim Heaton, having learned the name of Mrs. Dobbs' son-in-law during his inquiries, and the man went on his way. Reporting to me later, Mr. Panzer described him and the description fitted Vincent Tuttle. They are both in my office now and Mr. Panzer identifies Mr. Tuttle as the man he saw emerging from that house last night."

Wolfe turned. "Saul?"

"Yes, sir. Positive."

"Mr. Tuttle, do you wish to comment?"

"No."

"That is wise, I think." He returned to me. "Paragraph. Before dictating the preceding paragraph I asked Mr. Tuttle where he was last evening and he refused to tell me. I am also enclosing a summary of Mr. Panzer's conversation with Mrs. Dobbs. I must confess it is far from conclusive. She would not identify the man who had just left the house. She would not divulge the purpose of Bert Fyfe's visit to her. She would not discuss in any detail the events on that winter night twenty years ago.

"There are, of course, obvious conjectures. Was the alibi which Tuttle gave Bert a fraud, and Bert didn't dare to impeach it? Does Mrs. Dobbs know it was a fraud? Did Tuttle leave the rooming house that stormy night, but Bert didn't, and Mrs. Dobbs knows it? Did Tuttle go to the Fyfe home, get admitted by Louise, drug her chocolate drink, and later return and open the windows from the outside? I do not charge him with those acts, but the questions put themselves. I was not hired to find evidence to convict a murderer, but merely to decide whether a police investigation is called for, and I think it is, for the reasons given. I telephoned you this morning to suggest that you ask the Poughkeepsie police to put a guard on Mrs. Dobbs and the house she lives in, and said I would shortly tell you why. I have now told you. Paragraph.

"Many questions also put themselves regarding the death of Bert Fyfe. Merely as one example, if it is to be assumed that Vincent Tuttle, fearing exposure of a former crime, again undertook to help pneumonia kill a man, this time using dry ice instead of an open window, why did he leave the paper bag in the refrigerator that night, presumably with the ice cream still in it? Perhaps he didn't know there was a disposal chute in the pantry; and when, on Sunday afternoon, he found there was one he took the first opportunity to dump the thing.

"As for the dry ice it leaves no trace, so there is no record for you, but experts can furnish you with presumptions, as they did me. The chunks of ice were of course not put inside the bags; the limp empty bags were merely used as insulation to keep the ice from contact with the body. Probably the experts can tell you how long it would take small chunks of dry ice to wholly vaporize, but that point is not vital, since Mr. Tuttle was there in the apartment and could easily have had opportunity to remove the res-

idue, if any, before Paul discovered the body. That, and other pertinent questions, I leave to you. I have done the job I was hired for and I trust you will not need to consult me further."

Wolfe flattened his palms on the chair arms and took in the audience. "There it is," he said. "I didn't want to tell you about it and go all over it again for Mr. Cramer. Any questions?"

David was slumped in the red leather chair, his head down, staring at the floor. At Wolfe's question he slowly lifted his head. He then squeezed words out.

"I suppose I ought to feel sorry, but I don't. I always thought Bert killed his father. I always thought Vince's alibi was false, that he lied to save Bert, but I see it now. Without it Bert would probably have been convicted, so it did save him, but it saved Vince too. Of course Bert knew it was false, he knew he and Vince hadn't been together all evening, but if he said so, if he said Vince had gone out for a while, that would have destroyed his own alibi, and he didn't dare—and he didn't know Vince had killed our father. He might have suspected, but he didn't know. I see it now. I even see the Mrs. Dobbs' part." He frowned. "I'm trying to remember her testimony. She said she hadn't heard either of them go out, but probably she had, and she might have known which one, but if she said she heard either of them leave the house that would have ruined Bert's alibi, and she was crazy about Bert and she hadn't liked our father."

He thought he was going to say more, decided not to, rose from the chair, and turned to his brother. "Was this what you were after, Paul? Did you suspect this?"

"Hell, no," Paul said harshly. "You known damn well what I suspected, and who, and if this fat slob is right about the dry ice"—he bounced out of his chair and wheeled to face Johnny Arrow—"why couldn't it have been him? He had a key to the apartment! I never said I knew how he did it. And—now lay off!"

David had stepped across and grabbed his arm and for a second I thought Paul was going to sock his elder brother, but evidently David knew him better than I did. David said nothing, but he didn't have to. He merely hung onto his arm, steered him around back of the other chairs, and headed him toward the hall. They disappeared and Saul went to let them out.

"I have no questions," Dr. Buhl said. He arose and looked down at the Tuttles, then at Wolfe. "My God, after twenty years, you used a phrase, 'a window for death.' You have certainly opened

one." He looked down again. "Louise, you have been my patient nearly all your life. Are you all right?"

"I'm all right." Her high thin voice was trying not to be a wail. "I don't believe it."

Buhl opened his mouth to say more, decided not to, and went. Wolfe spoke to the man and wife who owned a fine drug store. "If you have no questions you might as well go."

Louise, with her teeth bearing down on her lip, tugged at her husband's sleeve. He took a deep breath, put a hand on her shoulder, and raised himself from the chair, and she came up with him. Side by side they headed for the door and I left them to Saul too. When they were out of sight Wolfe sent his eyes in the direction of the pair and said sharply, "Well? Have I fixed it up for you?"

Damned if they weren't holding hands, and they continued to hold as they got up and approached the desk. I am perfectly capable of holding hands, but not in public. Anne looked as if she wanted to cry but didn't intend to. Luckily it was Johnny's left hand she had, for he wanted to use the other one. When they got to the desk he stretched his arm across it and said, "Shake."

I should explain one thing. Since Johnny and Anne had no part in the performance why did Wolfe tell me to invite them? I didn't have to ask him. I know him. One little grand is a pretty skimpy fee for a job like that, spotting a murderer, and if Johnny Arrow came and saw the neat process by which the guy who had killed his partner was dug out he might feel inclined to show his appreciation by contributing a small hunk of uranium. That was the idea, no question about it, and for some weeks, as I flipped through the morning mail, I had my eye out for an envelope with his return address.

It never came and I quit expecting it.

But last week, just four days after a jury had convicted Vincent Tuttle of the first-degree murder of Bertram's Fyfe's father—it had been decided to try him for that one because it was a tighter case, especially after Mrs. Dobbs opened up—here came an envelope with Fyfe-Arrow Mining Corporation, Montreal, in the corner, and when I opened it and saw the amount of the check I raised my brows as high as they would go.

A really nice hunk.

There was no letter, but that was understandable. He had no time for writing letters. He was much too busy showing his wife how to prospect.

# **Edward D. Hoch**

## **Christmas Is for Cops**

*'Twas the month before Christmas  
And always our plan  
Was to find you a mystery  
With good will toward man . . .*

*But it didn't work out quite that way. So instead—*

*'Twas the month before Christmas  
And all through the nights  
We looked for a good mystery  
That put wrongs to rights . . .*

*Better . . . But crime at the Detective Bureau's annual Christmas party? Preposterous! Yet, as Captain Leopold of Homicide, now head of the newly reorganized Violent Crimes Division, said, "This has been a bad year for cops." So even the preposterous can happen . . .*

### **Detective: CAPTAIN LEOPOLD**

"Going to the Christmas party, Captain?" Fletcher asked from the doorway.

Captain Leopold glanced up from his eternally cluttered desk. Fletcher was now a lieutenant in the newly reorganized Violent Crimes Division, and they did not work together as closely as they once had. "I'll be there," Leopold said. "In fact, I've been invited to speak."

This news brought a grin to Fletcher's face. "Nobody speaks at the Christmas party, Captain. They just drink."

"Well, this year you're going to hear a speech, and I'm going to give it."

"Lots of luck."

"Is your wife helping with the decorations again this year?"

"I suppose she'll be around," Fletcher chuckled. "She doesn't trust me at any Christmas party without her."

The annual Detective Bureau party was, by tradition, a stag affair. But in recent years Carol Fletcher and some of the other wives had come down to Eagles Hall in the afternoon to trim the tree and hang the holly. Somehow these members of the unofficial Decorations Committee usually managed to stay on for the evening's festivities.

The party was the following evening, and Captain Leopold was looking forward to it. But he had one unpleasant task to perform first. That afternoon, feeling he could delay it no longer, he summoned Sergeant Tommy Gibson to his office and closed the door.

Gibson was a tough cop of the old school, a bleak and burly man who'd campaigned actively for the lieutenancy which had finally been given to Fletcher. Leopold had never liked Gibson, but until now he'd managed to overlook the petty graft with which Gibson's name was occasionally linked.

"What seems to be the trouble, Captain?" Gibson asked, taking a seat. "You look unhappy."

"I am unhappy, Gibson. Damned unhappy! While you were working the assault and robbery detail I had no direct command over your activities. But now that I'm in charge of a combined Violent Crimes Division, I feel I should take a greater interest in them." He reached across his desk to pick up a folder. "I have a report here from the District Attorney's office. The report mentions you, Gibson, and makes some very grave charges."

"What kind of charges?" the sergeant's tongue forked out to lick his dry lips.

"That you've been accepting regular payments from a man named Freese."

Gibson went pale. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Carl Freese, the man who runs the numbers racket in every factory in this city. You know who he is, and you know what he's done. Men who've opposed him, or tried to report his operations to the police, have been beaten and nearly killed. I have a report here of a foreman at Lecko Industries. When some of his men started losing a whole week's pay in the numbers and other gambling controlled by Freese, he went to his supervisor and reported it. That night on the way home his car was forced off the road and he was badly beaten, so badly that he spent three weeks

in the hospital. You should be familiar with that case, Gibson, because you investigated it just last summer."

"I guess I remember it."

"Remember your report, too? You wrote it off as a routine robbery attempt, despite the fact that no money was taken from the victim. The victim reported it to the District Attorney's office, and they've been investigating the whole matter of gambling in local industrial plants. I have their report here."

"I investigate a lot of cases, Captain. I try to do the best job I can."

"Nuts!" Leopold was on his feet, angry now. There was nothing that angered him more than a crooked cop. "Look, Gibson, the D.A.'s office has all of Freese's records. They show payments of \$100 a week to you. What in hell were you doing for \$100 a week, unless you were covering up for them when they beat some poor guy senseless?"

"Those records are wrong," Gibson said. "I didn't get any hundred bucks a week."

"Then how much did you get?"

Leopold towered over him in the chair, and Gibson's burly frame seemed to shrivel. "I think I want a lawyer," he mumbled.

"I'm suspending you from the force without pay, effective at once. Thank God you don't have a wife and family to suffer through this."

Tommy Gibson sat silently for a moment, staring at the floor. Then at last he looked up, seeking Leopold's eyes. "Give me a chance, Captain. I wasn't in this alone."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I didn't get the whole hundred myself. I had to split it with one of the other men—and he's the one who introduced me to Freese in the first place."

"There's someone else involved in this? One of the detectives?"

"Yes."

"Give me his name."

"Not yet." Gibson hesitated. "Because you wouldn't believe it. Let me give you evidence."

"What sort of evidence?"

"He and Freese came to me at my apartment and told me the type of protection they needed. That was the night we agreed on the amount of money to be paid each week. I wasn't taking any chances, Captain, so I dug out an old recording machine I'd

bought after the war, and rigged up a hidden microphone behind my sofa. I got down every word they said."

"When was this?" Leopold asked.

"More than a year ago, and I've kept the recording of the conversation ever since. What's it worth to me if I bring it in?"

"I'm not in a position to make deals, Gibson."

"Would the D.A. make one?"

"I could talk to him," Leopold replied cautiously. "Let's hear what you've got first."

Gibson nodded. "I'll take the reel off my machine and bring it in to you tomorrow."

"If you're kidding me, Gibson, or stalling—"

"I'm not, Captain! I swear! I just don't want to take the whole rap myself."

"I'll give you twenty-four hours. Then the suspension goes into effect regardless."

"Thank you, Captain."

"Get the hell out of here now."

"Thank you, Captain," he said again. "And Merry Christmas."

On the day of the Christmas party, activities around the Detective Bureau slacked off very little. It was always pretty much business as usual until around four o'clock, when some of the men started drifting out, exchanging friendly seasonal comments. The party would really commence around five, when the men on the day shift arrived at Eagles Hall, and it continued until well past midnight, enabling the evening men to join in after their tours of duty.

Then there would be a buffet supper, and lots of beer, and even some group singing around the big Christmas tree. Without the family attachments of Fletcher and the other men, Leopold tended to look forward to the party. In many years it was the main event of his otherwise lonely holiday season.

By four o'clock he had heard nothing from Sergeant Tommy Gibson. With growing irritation he called Fletcher into his office. "Gibson's under your command now, isn't he, Fletcher?"

"That's right, Captain."

"What's he working on today?"

Fletcher's face flushed unexpectedly. "Well, Captain, it seems—"

"Where is he?"

"Things were a bit slower than usual, so I told him he could go over to Eagles Hall and help put up the tree for the party."

"What!"

Fletcher shifted his feet uneasily. "I know, Captain. But usually I help Carol and the other wives get it up. Now that I'm a lieutenant I didn't feel I could take the time off, so I sent Gibson in my place."

Leopold sighed and stood up. "All right, Fletcher. Let's get over there right away."

"Why? What's up?"

"I'll tell you on the way."

Eagles Hall was a large reasonably modern building that was rented out for wedding receptions and private parties by a local fraternal group. The Detective Bureau, through its Benevolent Association, had held a Christmas party there for the past five seasons, and its central location had helped make it a popular choice. It was close enough to attract some of the uniformed force as well as the detective squad. All were invited, and most came at some time during the long evening.

Now, before five o'clock, a handful of plainclothesmen from various divisions had already arrived. Leopold waved to Sergeant Riker of the Vice Squad, who was helping Carol Fletcher light her cigarette with a balky lighter. Then he stopped to exchange a few words with Lieutenant Williams, a bony young man who headed up the Narcotics Squad. Williams had made his reputation during a single year on the force, masquerading as a hippie musician to penetrate a group selling drugs to high school students. Leopold liked him, liked his honesty and friendliness.

"I hear you're giving a little speech tonight," Williams said, pouring him a glass of beer.

"Herb Clarke roped me into it," Leopold answered with a chuckle. "I'd better do it early, before you guys get too beered up to listen." He glanced around the big hall, taking in the twenty-foot Christmas tree with its lights and tinsel. Three guy wires held it firmly in place next to an old upright piano. "See Tommy Gibson around?"

Williams stood on tiptoe to see over the heads of some newly arrived uniformed men. "I think he's helping Carol finish up the decorations."

"Thanks." Leopold took his beer and drifted over to the far end

of the room. Carol had put down her cigarette long enough to tug at one of the wires holding the tree in place. Leopold helped her tighten it and then stepped back. She was a charming, intelligent woman, and this was not the first time he'd envied Fletcher. As wife and mother she'd given him a fine home life.

"I'm surprised to see you here so early, Captain."

He helped her secure another of the wires and said, "I'm always on time to help charming wives with Christmas trees."

"And thank you for Sergeant Gibson too! He was a great help with the tree."

"I'll bet. Where is he now?"

"He took the hammer and things into the kitchen. I think he's pouring beer now." She produced another cigarette and searched her purse. Finally she asked, "Do you have a light?"

He lit it for her. "You smoke too much."

"Nervous energy. Do you like our tree?"

"Fine. Just like Christmas."

"Do you know, somewhere in Chesterton there's mention of a tree that devours birds nesting in its branches, and when spring comes the tree grows feathers instead of leaves!"

"You read too much, Carol."

She smiled up at him. "The nights are lonely being a detective's wife." The smile was just a bit forced. She didn't always approve of her husband's work.

He left her by the tree and went in search of Gibson. The burly sergeant was in the kitchen, filling pitchers of beer. He looked up, surprised, as Leopold entered. "Hello, Captain."

"I thought we had an appointment for today."

"I didn't forget. Fletcher wanted me over here."

"Where's the evidence you mentioned?"

"What?"

Leopold was growing impatient. "Come on, damn it!"

Tommy Gibson glanced out at the growing crowd. "I've got it, but I had to hide it. He's here."

"Who? The man who's in this with you?"

"Yes. I'm afraid Freese might have tipped him off about the D.A.'s investigation."

Leopold had never seen this side of Gibson—a lonely, trapped man who was actually afraid. Or else was an awfully good actor. "I've given you your twenty-four hours, Gibson. Either produce this recording you've got or—"

"Captain!" a voice interrupted. "We're ready for your speech."

Leopold turned to see Sergeant Turner of Missing Persons standing in the doorway. "I'll be right there, Jim." Turner seemed to linger just a bit too long before he turned and walked away. Leopold looked back at Gibson. "That him?"

"I can't talk now, Captain."

"Where'd you hide it?"

"Over by the tree. It's safe."

"Stick around till after my talk. Then we'll get to the bottom of this thing."

Leopold left him pouring another pitcher of beer and walked out through the crowd. With the end of the afternoon shifts the place had filled rapidly. There were perhaps sixty members of the force present already, about evenly divided between detectives and uniformed patrolmen. Several shook his hand or patted him on the back as he made his way to the dais next to the tree.

Herb Clarke, president of the Detective Bureau Benevolent Association, was already on the platform, holding up his hands for silence. He shook Leopold's hand and then turned to his audience. "Gather around now, men. The beer'll still be there in five minutes. You all know we're not much for speeches at these Christmas parties, but I thought it might be well this year to hear a few words from a man we all know and admire. Leopold has been in the Detective Bureau for as long as most of us can remember—" The laughter caused him to add quickly, "Though of course he's still a young man. But this year, in addition to his duties as Captain of Homicide, he's taken on a whole new set of responsibilities. He's now head of the entire Violent Crimes Division of the Bureau, a position that places him in more direct contact with us all. I'm going to ask him to say just a few words, and then we'll have some caroling around the piano."

Leopold stepped over to the microphone, adjusting it upward from the position Herb Clarke had used. Then he looked out at the sea of familiar faces. Carol Fletcher and the other wives hovered in the rear, out of the way, while their husbands and the others crowded around. Fletcher himself stood with Sergeant Riker, an old friend, and Leopold noticed that Lieutenant Williams had moved over near Tommy Gibson. He couldn't see Jim Turner at the moment.

"Men, I'm going to make this worth listening to for all that. You hear a lot at this time of the year about Christmas being the

season for kids, but I want to add something to that. Christmas is for kids, sure—but Christmas is for cops, too. Know what I mean by that? I'll tell you. Christmas is perhaps the one time of the year when the cop on the beat, or the detective on assignment, has a chance to undo some of the ill will generated during the other eleven months. This has been a bad year for cops around the country—most years are bad ones, it seems. We take a hell of a lot of abuse, some deserved, but most of it not. And this is the season to maybe right some of those wrongs. Don't be afraid to get out on a corner with the Salvation Army to ring a few bells, or help some lady through a puddle of slush. Most of all, don't be afraid to smile and talk to young people."

He paused and glanced down at Tommy Gibson. "There have always been some bad cops, and I guess there always will be. That just means the rest of us have to work a lot harder. Maybe we can just pretend the whole year is Christmas, and go about righting those wrongs. Anyway, I've talked so long already I've grown a bit thirsty. Let's get back to the beer and the singing, and make it good and loud!"

Leopold jumped off the platform and shook more hands. He'd meant to speak longer, to give them something a bit meatier to chew on, but far at the back of the crowd some of the younger cops were already growing restless. And, after all, they'd come here to enjoy themselves, not to listen to a lecture. He couldn't really blame them.

Herb Clarke was gathering everyone around the piano for songs, but Leopold noticed that Tommy Gibson had suddenly disappeared. The Captain threaded his way through the crowd, searching the familiar faces for the man he wanted. "Great talk, Captain," Fletcher said, coming up by his side.

"Thanks. We have to find Gibson."

"Did he tell you any more?"

"Only that he had to hide the tape near the Christmas tree. He said the other guy was here."

"Who do you make it, Captain?"

Leopold bit his lower lip. "I make it that Tommy Gibson is one smart cookie. I think he's playing for time, maybe waiting for Freese to get him off the hook somehow."

"You don't think there's another crooked cop in the Detective Bureau?"

"I don't know, Fletcher. I guess I don't want to think so."

The door to the Men's Room sprang open with a suddenness that surprised them both. Sergeant Riker, his usually placid face full of alarm, stood motioning to them. Leopold quickly covered the ground to his side. "What is it, Riker?"

"In there! My God, Captain—in there! It's Gibson!"

"What?"

"Tommy Gibson. He's been stabbed. I think he's dead."

Leopold pushed past him, into the tiled Men's Room with its scrubbed look and disinfectant odor. Tommy Gibson was there, all right, crumpled between two of the wash basins, his eyes glazed and open. A long pair of scissors protruded from his chest.

"Lock all the outside doors, Fletcher," Leopold barked. "Don't let anyone leave."

"Is he dead, Captain?"

"As dead as he'll ever be. What a mess!"

"You think one of our men did it?"

"Who else? Call in and report it, and get the squad on duty over here. Everyone else is a suspect." He stood up from examining the body and turned to Riker. "Now tell me everything you know, Sergeant."

Riker was a Vice Squad detective, a middle-aged man with a placid disposition and friendly manner. There were those who said he could even make a street-walker like him while he was arresting her. Just now he looked sick and pale. "I walked in and there he was, Captain. My God! I couldn't believe my eyes at first. I thought he was faking, playing some sort of a trick."

"Notice anyone leaving before you went in?"

"No, nobody."

"But he's only been dead a few minutes. That makes you a suspect, Sergeant."

Riker's pale complexion seemed to shade into green at Leopold's words. "You can't think I killed him! He was a friend of mine! Why in hell would I kill Tommy Gibson?"

"We'll see," Leopold said, motioning him out of the Men's Room. The other detectives and officers were clustered around, trying to see. There was a low somber hum of conversation. "All right, everyone!" the Captain ordered. "Keep down at the other end of the room, away from the tree! That's right, move away from it."

"Captain!" It was little Herb Clarke, pushing his way through. "Captain, what's happened?"

"Someone killed Tommy Gibson."

"Tommy!"

"One of us. That's why nobody leaves here."

"You can't be serious, Captain. Murder at the police Christmas party—the newspapers will crucify us."

"Probably," Leopold pushed past him. "Nobody enters the Men's Room," he bellowed. "Fletcher, Williams—come with me." They were the only two lieutenants present, and he had to trust them. Fletcher he'd trust with his life. He only hoped he could rely on Williams too.

"I can't believe it," the bony young Narcotics lieutenant said. "Why would anyone kill Tommy?"

Leopold cleared his throat. "I'll tell you why, though you may not want to believe it. Gibson was implicated in the District Attorney's investigation of Carl Freese's gambling empire. He had a tape recording of a conversation between Freese, himself, and another detective, apparently concerning bribery. The other detective had a dandy motive for killing him."

"Did he say who it was?" Williams asked.

"No. Only that it was someone who got here fairly early today. Who was here before Fletcher and I arrived?"

Williams creased his brow in thought. "Riker was here, and Jim Turner. And a few uniformed men."

"No, just detectives."

"Well, I guess Riker and Turner were the only ones. And Herb Clarke, of course. He was here all day with the ladies, arranging for the food and the beer."

"Those three," Leopold mused. "And you, of course."

Lieutenant Williams grinned. "Yeah, and me."

Leopold turned toward the big Christmas tree. "Gibson told me he hid the tape recording near the tree. Start looking, and don't miss anything. It might even be in the branches."

The investigating officers were arriving now, and Leopold turned his attention to them. There was something decidedly bizarre in the entire situation, a fact which was emphasized as the doctor and morgue attendants and police photographers exchanged muted greetings with the milling party guests. One of the young investigating detectives who'd known Tommy Gibson turned pale at the sight of the body and had to go outside.

When the photographers had finished, one of the morgue men started to lift the body. He paused and called to Leopold. "Cap-

tain, here's something. A cigarette lighter on the floor under him."

Leopold bent close to examine it without disturbing possible prints. "Initials. C.F."

Lieutenant Williams had come in behind him, standing at the door of the Men's Room. "Carl Freese?" he suggested.

Leopold used a handkerchief to pick it up carefully by the corners. "Are we supposed to believe that Freese entered this place in the midst of sixty cops and killed Gibson without anybody seeing him?"

"There's a window in the wall over there."

Leopold walked to the frosted pane and examined it. "Locked from the inside. Gibson might have been stabbed from outside, but he couldn't have locked the window and gotten across this room without leaving a trail of blood."

Fletcher had come in while they were talking. "No dice on that, Captain. My wife just identified the scissors as a pair she was using earlier with the decorations. It's an inside job, all right."

Leopold showed him the lighter. "C.F. Could be Carl Freese."

Fletcher frowned and licked his lips. "Yeah." He turned away.

"Nothing," Williams reported.

"Nothing in the tree? It could be a fairly small reel."

"Nothing."

Leopold sighed and motioned Fletcher and Williams to one side. He didn't want the others to hear. "Look, I think Gibson was probably lying, too. But he's dead, and that very fact indicates he might have been telling the truth. I have to figure all the angles. Now that you two have searched the tree I want you to go into the kitchen, close the door, and search each other. Carefully."

"But—" Williams began. "All right, Captain."

"Then line everybody up and do a search of them. You know what you're looking for—a reel of recording tape."

"What about the wives, Captain?"

"Get a matron down for them. I'm sorry to have to do it, but if that tape is here we have to find it."

He walked to the center of the hall and stood looking at the tree. Lights and tinsel, holiday wreaths and sprigs of mistletoe. All the trappings. He tried to imagine Tommy Gibson helping to decorate the place, helping with the tree. Where would he have hidden the tape?

Herb Clarke came over and said, "They're searching everybody."

"Yes. I'm sorry to spoil the party this way, but I guess it was spoiled for Gibson already."

"Captain, do you have to go on with this? Isn't one dishonest man in the Bureau enough?"

"One is too many, Herb. But the man we're looking for is more than a dishonest cop now. He's a murderer."

Fletcher came over to them. "We've searched all the detectives, Captain. They're clean. We're working on the uniformed men now."

Leopold grunted unhappily. He was sure they'd find nothing. "Suppose," he said slowly. "Suppose Gibson unreeled the tape. Suppose he strung it on the tree like tinsel."

"You see any brown tinsel hanging anywhere, Captain? See any tinsel of any color long enough to be a taped message?"

"No, I don't," Leopold said.

Two of the sergeants, Riker and Turner, came over to join them. "Could he have done it himself?" Turner asked. "The word is you were going to link him with the Freese investigation."

"Stabbing yourself in the chest with a pair of scissors isn't exactly common as a suicide method," Leopold pointed out. "Besides, it would be out of character for a man like Gibson."

One of the investigating officers came over with the lighter. "Only smudges on it, Captain. Nothing we could identify."

"Thanks." Leopold took it, turning it over between his fingers.

C.F. Carl Freese.

He flicked the lever a couple of times but it didn't light. Finally, on the fourth try, a flame appeared. "All right," he said quietly. Now he knew.

"Captain—" Fletcher began.

"Damn it, Fletcher, it's your wife's lighter and you know it! C.F. Not Carl Freese but Carol Fletcher!"

"Captain, I—" Fletcher stopped.

Leopold felt suddenly very tired. The colored lights of the tree seemed to blur, and he wished he was far away, in a land where all cops were honest and everyone died of old age.

Sergeant Riker moved in. "Captain, are you trying to say that Fletcher's wife stabbed Tommy Gibson?"

"Of course not, Riker. That would have been quite a trick for her to follow him into the Men's Room unnoticed. Besides, I had to give her a match at one point this evening, because she didn't have this lighter."

"Then who?"

"When I first arrived, you were helping Carol Fletcher with a balky lighter. Yes, you, Riker! You dropped it into your pocket, unthinking, and that's why she didn't have it later. It fell out while you were struggling with Gibson. While you were killing him, Riker."

Riker uttered a single obscenity and his hand went for the service revolver on his belt. Leopold had expected it. He moved in fast and threw two quick punches, one to the stomach and one to the jaw. Riker went down and it was over.

Carol Fletcher heard what had happened and she came over to Leopold. "Thanks for recovering my lighter," she said. "I hope you didn't suspect me."

He shook his head, eyeing Fletcher. "Of course not. But I sure as hell wish your husband had told me it was yours."

"I had to find out what it was doing there," Fletcher mumbled. "God, it's not every day your wife's lighter, that you gave her two Christmases ago, turns up as a clue in a murder."

Leopold handed it back to her. "Maybe this'll teach you to stop smoking."

"You knew it was Riker anyway?"

"I was pretty sure. With sixty men drinking beer all around here, no murderer could take a chance of walking out of that Men's Room unseen. His best bet was to pretend finding the body, which is just what he did. Besides that, of the four detectives on the scene early, Riker's Vice Squad position was the most logical for Freese's bribery."

"Was there a tape recording?" Fletcher asked.

Leopold was staring at the Christmas tree. "I think Gibson was telling the truth on that one. Except that he never called it a tape. I did that. I jumped to a conclusion. He simply told me it was an old machine, purchased after the war. In those early days tape recorders weren't the only kind. For a while wire recorders were almost as popular."

"Wire!"

Leopold nodded and started toward the Christmas tree. "We know that Gibson helped you put up the tree, Carol. I'm betting that one of those wires holding it in place is none other than the recorded conversation of Carl Freese, Tommy Gibson, and Sergeant Riker."

# Nedra Tyre

## The Murder Game

*It was only a game, an innocent parlor game. True, it dealt with murders and suspects and clues—but it was only fun, only make-believe. Aunt Felicity was the one really responsible for the game—she had started the ritual and had insisted the game be played at every gathering of her nieces and nephews. Aunt Felicity was a witty, inventive old lady, and an excellent improviser. So when the desperate need arose, she turned the game into a deadly pastime . . .*

*Can you match wits with Aunt Felicity? Could she have depended on you to play her game successfully? . . .*

**I**t was time for the murder game.

To play it, my brothers and sisters and I, all six of us, were gathered as usual on the first Tuesday night of the month in our Aunt Felicity's huge and impressive bedroom which was big enough for a royal levee. From its high stuccoed ceiling hung two Venetian chandeliers. A vast canopied bed dominated one end of the room. We were sitting in the other end at small candlelit tables set in the bay window that overlooked the rolling expanse of lawn that swept down to the river.

We had finished eating a simple but superbly cooked dinner. Our three tables were grouped in a semicircle around the Recamier sofa on which Aunt Felicity, beautiful and elegant but badly crippled from arthritis, had half reclined as she ate from a tray.

I didn't like the foolish game, nor as far as I could see did my brothers and sisters; but five months previously Aunt Felicity had proposed it out of the blue, and she had been so kind to us, so loving and generous, that none of us dared protest at first, and by now it had become a monthly ritual.

Five of us were not the least bit good at parlor games. As children we hadn't played them. My three brothers were

competitive and excellent sportsmen, and competitive in business and spectacular successes for such young men—Carl and Matthew were lawyers, but not partners, and Andrew was an investment banker. Alicia, our oldest sister, was competitive socially and the most prominent young hostess in the city; her parties were famous—people literally clawed each other for invitations to her balls.

However competitive my brothers and Alicia were in the professional and social worlds they were inept at Aunt Felicity's murder game.

Jeanine—next to me the youngest girl—always won the game. Always.

She was the scholar among us, the bright one. I don't think she had a competitive bone in her body, and she discounted the prodigious store of knowledge that she possessed. She was genuinely modest about it. Her attitude seemed to be that she could not take pride in having mastered some information when there was so much more to be acquired. All the same, I think it irked my brothers that the murder game was so easy for her.

I will describe the game as we played it. Perhaps it's a variation of a well-known game. As I say, we hadn't played parlor games either as children or adults. Previously we had only talked when we had dinner together on the first Tuesday of each month. We never ran out of things to say to each other. It was our one night together when there were no outsiders; not even our brothers' wives or Alicia's husband joined us.

When we had finished eating, Jeanine and I would clear away the dishes and pile them in the dumbwaiter and send them down to the kitchen where Mr. and Mrs. Finch were waiting for them. Our brothers would draw up chairs around Aunt Felicity. Alicia and I sat together on a loveseat, and Jeanine, as if to hide herself and her brightness and her inevitable triumph, sat in a small Louis XV chair behind our brothers.

The game began when Aunt Felicity reached into the drawer of a table near her and took out six sheets of rather ratty-looking scratch paper on which she had inscribed with a red nylon-tipped pen the first names of the persons suspected of murder; then she would tell us that the murdered person, before expiring, had been able to write something which indicated the name of the murderer, but that the murderer himself, or herself, intent on getting away from the scene of the crime, was not aware of

having been incriminated, since the clever victim had been able to point to the murderer in an oblique way.

Aunt Felicity handed the sheets to Carl and he distributed them.

We read the names of the suspects: Horace, Llewellyn, Mary Ann, Joan, Louise, Margaret; Lawrence.

Before the victim died he had been able to scrawl one word: George.

Again Carl rose. Again he took six sheets from Aunt Felicity and handed them around to us. We now held a sheet with the names of the suspects in red and a sheet with the one word George in black.

We all—except for Jeanine, of course—began to frown in disgruntled perplexity.

Aunt Felicity asked if anyone had the solution. No one answered. She quizzed us in turn beginning with Carl who was nearest to her. When my time came I said I had no idea who was guilty. Occasionally Alicia would make a stab, but it was always a futile, incorrect one. And our brothers invariably became jocular, charming, bluffing, willing to take a chance, and on rare occasions one of them made a lucky guess, but he could never prove it by evidence or any sort of clue.

Aunt Felicity didn't let the game drag on or permit our brothers to become too rollicking with their random guesses. She would suddenly say, "Jeanine, who is the murderer?"

Tonight, as usual, Jeanine was neither coy nor hesitant in answering. Her voice was clear but modest. "The murderer is Mary Ann."

"That's right," Aunt Felicity said. "Now tell us why Mary Ann is the guilty one."

"Well, the victim wrote down George. George Eliot is the name under which Mary Ann Evans published her novels. Therefore George equals Mary Ann."

"Good lord," Matthew said. "I haven't thought about George Eliot since I was a freshman in high school and had to read *Silas Marner* and *The Mill on the Floss*."

With Jeanine's naming the murderer our evening together was over. I gathered up the twelve pieces of paper we had used in the game and threw them into the wastebasket. My brothers and sisters lined up around the sofa and kissed Aunt Felicity good night and then they left me alone with her. We were an

affectionate family, in touch with each other two or three times a day by telephone, and my brothers and their wives and Alicia and her husband and Jeanine, who wasn't married but lived on campus at a nearby university where she was an assistant curator in the Museum of Fine Arts, made numerous brief visits nearly every week.

My brothers relied on Aunt Felicity's advice and counsel and she relied on theirs. She had been our guardian ever since our parents had been killed in a plane crash, the same crash that had killed Aunt Felicity's husband. At the time of that tragedy Carl, the oldest child, had been twelve and I, Sue, the youngest, five. Aunt Felicity had taken us into her large house copied from an English manor and had given us a wonderful life, and by shrewd investments had made a substantial fortune for us out of our parents' estate, so that we were all well off financially when we came of age.

I had neither my brothers' drive for professional success nor Jeanine's brains nor Alicia's flair for society, and so I stayed with Aunt Felicity. She needed me, especially after she was stricken with arthritis. I found it satisfying to give back a little of the care and devotion she had given us. I did her errands and her telephoning. She found it difficult to dial or to hold the telephone, but liked to be in immediate and constant touch with people. I made dozens, sometimes scores, of calls for her every day. I invited her continuous flow of guests. She was a witty and informed conversationalist who liked to have witty people around her. I bought books for her to read, sent presents and flowers for her, got up at dawn to go to the farmers' market when Aunt Felicity wanted special food to prepare for a gourmet friend. I searched the shops for kaftans and long elegant dressing gowns that would hide Aunt Felicity's crippled body.

That night when my brothers and sisters had left after Jeanine had said that Mary Ann was the name of the murderer, I wanted to say as I helped Aunt Felicity make the painful, labored journey from the sofa to her bed, "Why do you have us play that silly game? Don't you see that none of us really likes it? And it embarrasses Jeanine to win all the time. I've never known you to make other guests ill at ease. Why don't you stop insisting that we play it?"

But I didn't complain.

And the game did end soon.

Or at least we were to be given a respite when Jeanine left town at the end of the semester. She took a brief leave from the university to spend the spring in Italy studying art in churches and museums.

I had thought that perhaps at our last gathering before Jeanine left, Aunt Felicity wouldn't make us play the game, but I was wrong.

As always, when our meal was finished and the dishes were cleared away, Aunt Felicity told us to take our places for the game, and once we were settled she reached into the drawer and handed Carl the slips with the names of the suspects. Carl handed a slip to each of us and we read the names: Cleo, Annette, Josephine, Melissa, Maude, Frank, James, Warren.

Then came the sheet with the clue: a serpentine line, an irregular, lopsided S.

Andrew was brash and even before Aunt Felicity asked for volunteer answers he said, "The guilty person is Cleo. The clue that looks like an S is a serpent, the asp that caused Cleopatra's death. Cleopatra equals Cleo. Sorry, Jeanine, to end your unbroken streak of victories, especially on your last night."

"A very good guess," Aunt Felicity said. "But the name on the list of suspects is Cleo, not Cleopatra. Your answer is wrong."

After Andrew's gaffe no one else guessed or offered any kind of comment. It was, I think, the shortest game on record.

As always, Aunt Felicity turned to Jeanine and asked for the answer.

"The murderer is Josephine," Jeanine said. "The clue—the S—is the outline of a swan. The swan was Empress Josephine's motif or emblem or whatever you want to call it. She had swans embossed everywhere. So the swan equals Josephine and Josephine is the guilty one."

Aunt Felicity gave Jeanine a congratulatory smile.

Then we all kissed one another good night and wished Jeanine a wonderful trip.

And that, as it happened, was the last time that we ever played the game of murder.

The next week was frantic for me. Even more than usual the telephone was like an appendage, an extra limb I'd grown in order to function. Aunt Felicity gave a large reception for the curator taking Jeanine's place and introduced him to the young painters and writers in town. Then a famous conductor, an old

friend of Aunt Felicity, arrived for a concert and Aunt Felicity invited him and his entire orchestra to a late supper party.

I had never made so many telephone calls or done so many errands, and the night after the supper party when I handed Aunt Felicity her dinner on a tray she insisted that I go to bed immediately.

"You look dead-tired," Aunt Felicity said, "I've imposed on you too much. I don't need you tonight. I'll have Finch come up for the tray and he can send any callers upstairs. If any of the children"—she still referred to my brothers and sisters and me as children—"come they have their own keys."

I glanced at the bedside table to be sure everything she needed was at hand. Two books of her two favorite poets—Keats and Gerard Manley Hopkins—were there; the sherry decanter beside them was full—Aunt Felicity liked to sip sherry as she read, the last thing she did before going to sleep.

"Sue, darling, everything I can possibly want is within reach," she said. "Now go and get some rest." She lifted her forehead toward me and I kissed it and we said good night.

Twelve hours of sleep was all I needed to give me back my energy.

I woke up the next morning feeling equal to a hundred telephone calls and errands. I bathed and dressed quickly, then went as usual into Aunt Felicity's room. I tidied up a bit and picked up the Hopkins book that had fallen to the floor and set it in its accustomed place beside the volume of Keats. I often found a book on the floor where it had fallen out of Aunt Felicity's hand when she had dozed off to sleep. I adjusted the shutters so that the sunlight streamed in.

Then I went to the bathroom and moistened a washcloth so that Aunt Felicity could sponge her face and hands. I leaned under the canopy and pushed back the heavy curtains of the bed and called to Aunt Felicity.

Her alert eyes did not look up at me.

She did not give me her usual radiant smile.

She was turned so that she seemed to be submerged, drowned in the deep mound of pillows.

I realized then that she was dead, but that did not keep me from repeating her name again and again, as if I might somehow arouse her; and then I compelled myself to do what must be done.

I made one telephone call after another that morning. The first

one was to Dr. Cowan who came to the house immediately.

"Don't grieve for Felicity," he said as we stood beside her dead body, and even as he ordered me not to grieve I saw that he was weeping for his dear friend. "Every moment of her life was pain." He wiped his eyes and recovered his professionalism. "Her death seems a perfectly natural one. I'll examine her, of course. When you call your family and friends, just say that Felicity died in her sleep."

As I left the room to make the sad announcement, I saw Dr. Cowan stoop over her body.

Whatever he had said to me about not grieving for Aunt Felicity, I mourned for her. I knew that life was precious to her and that however acute her pain and the inconvenience of being an invalid, she considered them a small price to pay for the pleasure and exhilaration of living.

Carl and Andrew and Matthew and their wives and Alicia and her husband arrived within minutes after I telephoned them, a prelude to an invasion of friends and acquaintances. Soon the house was crowded with people. After some delay I had reached Jeanine in Florence and managed to convince her that there was no reason for her to come home for the funeral—Aunt Felicity wouldn't have wanted her to interrupt her studies.

Late that morning I went to the kitchen to brew more tea for the guests and Matthew was coming up from the cellar with four bottles of sherry to replenish the supply. He motioned me into the pantry out of hearing of Mrs. Finch and the maids preparing refreshments.

"Sue," he whispered, "she didn't leave one of those pieces of paper with a clue on it, did she?"

"What do you mean?"

"That game of murder meant so much to Aunt Felicity. Maybe she had a premonition that she was going to be killed. Maybe that's why she made us play it so that we could discover her murderer."

I couldn't answer Matthew. I stared at him. He might have said an obscenity over Aunt Felicity's body.

My lack of answer was evidently answer enough for Matthew. "I know it's far-fetched," he said. "I—well, my God, I suppose I'm crazy but I thought maybe she had been murdered. Whatever you do, don't mention my suspicions to the others."

And then Carl and Andrew in turn stalked me, each cornering

## THE MURDER GAME

me privately in that house teeming with callers and prodding me to learn whether Aunt Felicity had left a clue that might point to her murderer. My shock and disbelief made them back away with apologies. The suspicions appalled me; and each swore me to secrecy, none of them wanting his dark mistrust to be told to the others.

But when Alicia grabbed my arm and pulled me into the downstairs powder room and locked the door behind us and asked if Aunt Felicity had left a clue I was less shocked. I now had questions of my own.

"Who would be the suspects, Alicia?"

"Any of us. All of us."

"But why? Why on earth would any of us want to murder Aunt Felicity?"

"Money," Alicia said. "Aunt Felicity was very, very rich and she left her fortune to us."

"Money? We all have money of our own. We don't need Aunt Felicity's money."

"Don't be naive, Sue. No one ever has enough money. I happen to know that Andrew is desperate for ready cash, and Carl has a new love affair but his wife won't give him a divorce without stripping him of everything he owns. And Matthew—"

I held up my hand for her to stop talking.

"Little baby sister," she said, "you're much too unworldly. You've spent your adult life being an errand girl and making telephone calls. I didn't mean to upset you or to make monsters out of our brothers. Someone could have murdered Aunt Felicity out of pity. It was unbearable sometimes to watch her hopeless fight against pain. I've longed for her to die so that her suffering would be over."

"But, Alicia, how could she have been murdered?"

"I don't know. Maybe an overdose of sleeping pills or something else put into her sherry. We all knew she drank it before going to sleep."

I slumped into the chair at the dressing table.

"Stop looking so horror-struck," Alicia ordered. "And get up out of that chair. We've guests to attend to. Come on."

At last Aunt Felicity's house was empty of all the callers; my brothers and sister, about to leave, insisted I not spend the night alone; each invited me to be an overnight guest.

"Alone?" I said. "I'm not alone. Mr. and Mrs. Finch are here. I want to stay where I belong—in Aunt Felicity's house."

I had no intention of leaving, and I was relieved finally to close the front door on my brothers and Alicia and go to my room.

It had been a long difficult day and the night was almost over. I needed rest for the approaching funeral and all the details that would precede and follow it.

But I could not sleep.

Seemingly the only thing alive in that dark and silent house was my small bedside clock and its regular tick and its illuminated hands that kept circling around and around as the slow and sleepless hours marched past.

Then a breeze swirled up from the front door and ascended the stairway and turned the corridor and swept into my room; and the most cautious footsteps I ever heard mounted the stairs and eased into Aunt Felicity's room.

And I knew that Carl or Matthew or Andrew or Alicia was searching there for a sheet of paper bearing a clue that would point to Aunt Felicity's murderer. They had been right to be suspicious. I was, as Alicia had said, the naive one.

Aunt Felicity's game of murder had been played all along for a real purpose.

But I tried to persuade myself that the darkness and my tiredness had exaggerated everything, that I had only imagined the breeze that had entered with the opening of the front door. I could not have heard any footsteps—the chatter of the clock would have muffled them.

But perhaps I ought to make sure.

Perhaps I ought to get up and look into Aunt Felicity's room.

Then above the ticking of the clock I heard descending footsteps and then the front door opened and closed.

There was still time for me to find out who had come in. I could rush to the entrance and see whose car was driving away.

Then I told myself that surely our loving family had not bred a murderer. Whoever had entered had only wanted to check to be sure that Aunt Felicity had not left a clue; it was not a murderer intent on destroying a clue. Aunt Felicity's game of murder had only been an innocent pastime with the slight moral purpose of proving Jeanine's superiority over Matthew's and Carl's and Andrew's and Alicia's wordliness and my aimlessness.

That idea reassured me and I managed to fall asleep.

But I was not reassured when I awoke. My one resolution was to play out the murder game.

I had never liked the game, but that didn't matter now. For once I must be adept at it. Jeanine, the only one good at the game, was thousands of miles away, and if Aunt Felicity had left a clue she would have meant it for me. She knew I wasn't subtle like Jeanine, so she would have left a clue easy for me to decipher.

I went resolutely into Aunt Felicity's room.

The last time I had been in there, I had discovered her dead body.

But before I had discovered she was dead I had gone about the ordinary morning routine. I had picked up a book of poetry from the floor and had set it on the bedside table where it was now. I had opened the shutters and had gone to the bathroom to dampen a washcloth.

I looked around me.

Nothing about the room resembled itself. The bed with its hangings seemed almost pretentious, the tambour organdy curtains looked too stiff, the French sofas and armchairs belonged to a stage set, the chandeliers should light a palace ballroom, the paintings ought to hang in a museum.

Without Aunt Felicity's presence the room had lost its elegance, all its personality.

I walked over to the small table near the Recamier sofa from which Aunt Felicity had taken, as she began the murder game, the sheets listing the names of the suspects. The drawer contained pads of scratch paper. I fluttered through them, but I could find nothing written on any sheet.

Then I realized that if Aunt Felicity were in the last moments of her life and aware of her predicament she must certainly have been in bed, and would have had no way to make the arduous journey from her bed to the table and back again without help, which she could surely not have requested of her murderer.

So she would have left the clue near or in the bed.

But the bedside table had nothing to offer. The books of poetry and the sherry decanter and wine glasses were on it. Inside the top drawer were my aunt's cosmetics and medicines. The bottom drawer held stationery and various pens and pencils, but everything was innocent of the clue in Aunt Felicity's handwriting for which I was searching.

I pulled back the bedcovers. No doubt Mrs. Finch had changed the sheets after Aunt Felicity's death and had dislodged the clue if Aunt Felicity had left it in the bed. Mrs. Finch would have thrown it in the trash if it had fluttered out at her. I found nothing in the bedsheets or stuffed under the mattress or in any of the pillowcases.

There was no clue.

Or if there had been one the early morning visitor had found it and removed it.

But I would not give up.

I looked again at the collections of poetry. I picked up the Keats book and riffled its pages. There was nothing in it. I put it back and took up the Hopkins book; the only extraneous thing in it was a small piece of paper that marked Aunt Felicity's reading place.

I snatched the paper. It was not identical in size to the pads of scratch paper which Aunt Felicity used for the murder game, but it did not need to be. A single word was written on it with the black nylon-tipped pen that Aunt Felicity always used when she wrote down the clues.

The word was TERENCE.

I said the name aloud. It was vaguely familiar. Terence was a writer of antiquity, wasn't he? I didn't know. I didn't have Jeanine's fund of information. Holding the sheet of paper, I ran downstairs to the library and pulled a biographical dictionary from a shelf. "Terence," I read. 'Publius Terentius Afer. 190-159 B.C.' My eyes raced down the rest of the entry but I paid no attention to what I was reading. It was of no use to me. Aunt Felicity would have known I couldn't make deductions from a literary reference. She would have made it easier for me.

But however simple or easy she might have thought she was making it she had not made it simple enough or clear enough for me.

Terence.

Terence.

Terence.

It meant absolutely nothing.

The telephone rang, summoning me to all the duties and details attendant on Aunt Felicity's funeral.

It was Mr. Frame, Aunt Felicity's attorney, telling me that the undertaker had tentatively arranged for the service to be held at

two the next afternoon if it would be satisfactory with us. He asked me to telephone Alicia and my brothers and then to let the undertaker know.

I would telephone them and then I would call Dr. Cowan and ask if Aunt Felicity could possibly have been murdered. I would tell him I thought that as Aunt Felicity had grown drowsier and drowsier after her last caller had left she realized that the caller had put something lethal in her sherry when it was poured out for her, and that just before she died she had managed to write something that incriminated the caller and had put the slip of paper in a book just before it fell out of her hand.

First, though, I must telephone about the time of the funeral.

As always I began with Carl, since he was the oldest.

His telephone was busy, so I called Matthew. Two o'clock was satisfactory with him. I called Carl again, but his line was still busy. So I dialed Alicia and then Andrew; each said the hour was agreeable.

Carl was the only one left to question and his line was still busy; I kept dialing.

And then I realized that Aunt Felicity *had* made it simple for me.

Terence.

My finger, plucking at numbers, had also been dialing letters of the alphabet, and Carl's number was 837-3623.

I wanted the line to stay busy forever, but on my next try Carl answered. I told him the proposed hour of Aunt Felicity's funeral and, as with the others, it was all right with him.

Then I said, "Carl, Aunt Felicity did leave a clue. I found it a little while ago. The clue she wrote was Terence. It was directed at me because I use the telephone so much. When I dialed your number—837-3623—I also dialed T-E-R-E-N-C-E. As Jeanine would say, Terence equals Carl. You killed Aunt Felicity."

There was a long pause and then a sound I had never heard on a telephone. I thought at first that a door might have slammed, but then I heard my sister-in-law scream and I knew that Carl had shot himself.

"Q"

# Ross Macdonald

## Midnight Blue

*Ross Macdonald is acknowledged, by critics and readers, to be the most talented successor to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and he wears their tough-textured mantle with authority. And critics generally agree that one of the best, if not the best, of the Lew Archer novelets is "Midnight Blue"—the hard-hitting story of what Lew Archer, private eye, found in his private shooting gallery far from Hollywood's rat race; a story of vivid similes about a day that was "turning bad for everybody," when Lew Archer "felt the dull old nagging pull of other people's trouble, like a toothache you can't leave alone"; the story of a high school girl who was "a little wild—she'd do a thing because it was wrong, because it was dangerous"...*

### Detective: LEW ARCHER

It had rained in the canyon during the night. The world had the colored freshness of a butterfly just emerged from the chrysalis stage and trembling in the sun. Actual butterflies danced in flight across free spaces of air or played a game of tag without any rules among the tree branches. At this height there were giant pines among the eucalyptus trees.

I parked my car where I usually parked it, in the shadow of the stone building just inside the gates of the old estate. Just inside the posts, that is—the gates had long since fallen from their rusted hinges. The owner of the country house had died in Europe, and the place had stood empty since the war. It was one reason I came here on the occasional Sunday when I wanted to get away from the Hollywood rat race. Nobody lived within two miles.

Until now, anyway. The window of the gatehouse overlooking the drive had been broken the last time that I'd noticed it. Now it

was patched up with a piece of cardboard. Through a hole punched in the middle of the cardboard, bright emptiness watched me—human eye's bright emptiness.

"Hello," I said.

A grudging voice answered, "Hello."

The gatehouse door creaked open, and a white-haired man came out. A smile sat strangely on his ravaged face. He walked mechanically, shuffling in the leaves, as if his body was not at home in the world. He wore faded denims through which his clumsy muscles bulged like animals in a sack. His feet were bare.

I saw when he came up to me that he was a huge old man, a head taller than I was and a foot wider. His smile was not a greeting or any kind of smile that I could respond to. It was the stretched, blind grimace of a man who lived in a world of his own, a world that didn't include me.

"Get out of here. I don't want trouble. I don't want nobody messin' around."

"No trouble," I said. "I came up to do-a little target shooting. I probably have as much right here as you have."

His eyes widened. They were as blue and empty as holes in his head through which I could see the sky.

"Nobody has the rights here that I have. I lifted up mine eyes unto the hills and the voice spoke and I found sanctuary. Nobody's going to force me out of my sanctuary."

I could feel the short hairs bristling on the back of my neck. Though my instincts didn't say so, he was probably a harmless nut. I tried to keep my instincts out of my voice.

"I won't bother you. You don't bother me. That should be fair enough."

"You bother me just *being* here. I can't stand people. I can't stand cars. And this is twice in two days you come up harrying me and harassing me."

"I haven't been here for a month."

"You're an Ananias liar." His voice whined like a rising wind. He clenched his knobbed fists and shuddered on the verge of violence.

"Calm down, old man," I said. "There's room in the world for both of us."

He looked around at the high green world as if my words had snapped him out of a dream.

"You're right," he said in a different voice. "I have been blessed,

and I must remember to be joyful. Creation belongs to all of us poor creatures." His smiling teeth were as long and yellow as an old horse's. His roving glance fell on my car. "And it wasn't you who come up here last night. It was a different automobile. I remember."

He turned away, muttering something about washing his socks, and dragged his horny feet back into the gatehouse. I got my targets, pistol, and ammunition out of the trunk, and locked the car up tight. The old man watched me through his peephole, but he didn't come out again.

Below the road, in the wild canyon, there was an open meadow backed by a sheer bank which was topped by the crumbling wall of the estate. It was my shooting gallery. I slid down the wet grass of the bank and tacked a target to an oak tree, using the butt of my heavy-framed .22 as a hammer.

While I was loading it, something caught my eye—something that glinted red, like a ruby among the leaves. I stopped to pick it up and found that it was attached. It was a red-enamored fingernail at the tip of a white hand. The hand was cold and stiff.

I let out a sound that must have been loud in the stillness. A jaybird erupted from a manzanita, sailed up to a high limb of the oak, and yelled down curses at me. A dozen chickadees flew out of the oak and settled in another at the far end of the meadow.

Panting like a dog, I scraped away the dirt and wet leaves that had been loosely piled over the body. It was the body of a girl wearing a midnight-blue sweater and skirt. She was a blonde, about 17. The blood that congested her face made her look old and dark. The white rope with which she had been garroted was sunk almost out of sight in the flesh of her neck. The rope was tied at the nape in what is called a granny's knot, the kind of knot that any child can tie.

I left her where she lay and climbed back up to the road on trembling knees. The grass showed traces of the track her body had made where someone had dragged it down the bank. I looked for tire marks on the shoulder and in the rutted, impacted gravel of the road. If there had been any, the rain had washed them out.

I trudged up the road to the gatehouse and knocked on the door. It creaked inward under my hand. Inside there was nothing alive but the spiders that had webbed the low black beam. A dustless rectangle in front of the stone fireplace showed where a bedroll had lain. Several blackened tin cans had evidently been used as

cooking utensils. Gray embers lay on the cavernous hearth. Suspended above it from a spike in the mantel was a pair of white cotton work socks. The socks were wet. Their owner had left in a hurry.

It wasn't my job to hunt him. I drove down the canyon to the highway and along it for a few miles to the outskirts of the nearest town. There a drab green box of a building with a flag in front of it housed the Highway Patrol. Across the highway was a lumberyard, deserted on Sunday.

"Too bad about Ginnie," the dispatcher said when she had radioed the local sheriff. She was a thirtyish brunette with fine black eyes and dirty fingernails. She had on a plain white blouse, which was full of her.

"Do you know Ginnie?"

"My young sister knows her. They go—they went to high school together. It's an awful thing when it happens to a young person like that. I knew she was missing—I got the report when I came on at eight—but I kept hoping that she was just off on a lost weekend, like. Now there's nothing to hope for, is there?" Her eyes were liquid with feeling. "Poor Ginnie. And poor Mr. Green."

"Her father?"

"That's right. He was in here with her high school counselor not more than an hour ago. I hope he doesn't come back right away. I don't want to be the one that has to tell him."

"How long has the girl been missing?"

"Just since last night. We got the report here about three a.m., I think. Apparently she wandered away from a party at Cavern Beach. Down the pike a ways." She pointed south toward the canyon mouth.

"What kind of party was it?"

"Some of the kids from the Union High School—they took some wienies down and had a fire. The party was part of graduation week. I happen to know about it because my young sister Alice went. I didn't want her to go, even if it was supervised. That can be a dangerous beach at night. All sorts of bums and scroungers hang out in the caves. Why, one night when I was a kid I saw a naked man down there in the moonlight. He didn't have a woman with him, either."

She caught the drift of her words, did a slow blush, and checked her loquacity. I leaned on the plywood counter between us.

"What sort of girl was Ginnie Green?"

"I wouldn't know. I never really knew her."

"Your sister does."

"I don't let my sister run around with girls like Ginnie Green. Does that answer your question?"

"Not in any detail."

"It seems to me you ask a lot of questions."

"I'm naturally interested, since I found her. Also, I'm a private detective."

"Looking for a job?"

"I can always use a job."

"So can I, and I've got one and I don't intend to lose it." She softened the words with a smile. "Excuse me; I have work to do."

She turned to her short-wave and sent out a message to the patrol cars that Virginia Green had been found. Virginia Green's father heard it as he came in the door. He was a puffy gray-faced man with red-rimmed eyes. Striped pajama bottoms showed below the cuffs of his trousers. His shoes were muddy, and he walked as if he had been walking all night.

He supported himself on the edge of the counter, opening and shutting his mouth like a beached fish. Words came out, half strangled by shock.

"I heard you say she was dead, Anita."

The woman raised her eyes to his. "Yes, I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Green."

He put his face down on the counter and stayed there like a penitent, perfectly still. I could hear a clock somewhere, snipping off seconds, and in the back of the room the L.A. police signals like muttering voices coming in from another planet. Another planet very much like this one, where violence measured out the hours.

"It's my fault," Green said to the bare wood under his face. "I didn't bring her up properly. I haven't been a good father."

The woman watched him with dark and glistening eyes ready to spill. She stretched out an unconscious hand to touch him, pulled her hand back in embarrassment when a second man came into the station. He was a young man with crew-cut brown hair, tanned and fit-looking in a Hawaiian shirt. Fit-looking except for the glare of sleeplessness in his eyes and the anxious lines around them.

"What is it, Miss Brocco? What's the word?"

"The word is bad." She sounded angry. "Somebody murdered Ginnie Green. This man here is a detective and he just found her body up in Trumbull Canyon."

The young man ran his fingers through his short hair and failed to get a grip on it, or on himself. "My God! That's terrible!"

"Yes," the woman said. "You were supposed to be looking after her, weren't you?"

They glared at each other across the counter. The tips of her breasts pointed at him through her blouse like accusing fingers. The young man lost the glaring match. He turned to me.

"My name is Connor, Franklin Connor, and I'm afraid I'm very much to blame in this. I'm a counselor at the high school, and I was supposed to be looking after the party, as Miss Brocco said."

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't realize. I mean, I thought they were all perfectly happy and safe. The boys and girls had pretty well paired off around the fire. Frankly, I felt rather out of place. They aren't children, you know. They were all seniors, they had cars. So I said good night and walked home along the beach. As a matter of fact, I was hoping for a phone call from my wife."

"What time did you leave the party?"

"It must have been nearly eleven. The ones who hadn't paired off had gone home."

"Who did Ginnie pair off with?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I wasn't paying too much attention to the kids. It's graduation week, and I've had a lot of problems—"

The father, Green, had been listening with a changing face. In a sudden yammering rage his implosive grief and guilt exploded outward.

"It's your business to know! By God, I'll have your job for this. I'll make it *my* business to run you out of town."

Connor hung his head and looked at the stained tile floor. There was a thin spot in his short brown hair, and his scalp gleamed through it like bare white bone. It was turning into a bad day for everybody, and I felt the dull old nagging pull of other people's trouble, like a toothache you can't leave alone.

The sheriff arrived, flanked by several deputies and an HP sergeant. He wore a Western hat and a rawhide tie and a blue gabardine business suit which together produced a kind of gun-smog effect. His name was Pearsall.

I rode back up the canyon in the right front seat of Pearsall's black Buick, filling him in on the way. The deputies' Ford and an HP car followed us, and Green's new Oldsmobile convertible brought up the rear.

The sheriff said, "The old guy sounds like a loony to me."

"He's a loner, anyway."

"You never can tell about them hoboes. That's why I give my boys instructions to roust 'em. Well, it looks like an open-and-shut case."

"Maybe. Let's keep our minds open anyway, Sheriff."

"Sure. Sure. But the old guy went on the run. That shows consciousness of guilt. Don't worry, we'll hunt him down. I got men that know these hills like you know your wife's geography."

"I'm not married."

"Your girl friend, then." He gave me a sideways leer that was no gift. "And if we can't find him on foot, we'll use the air squadron."

"You have an air squadron?"

"Volunteers, mostly local ranchers. We'll get him." His tires squealed on a curve. "Was the girl raped?"

"I didn't try to find out. I'm not a doctor. I left her as she was."

The sheriff grunted. "You did the right thing at that."

Nothing had changed in the high meadow. The girl lay waiting to have her picture taken. It was taken many times, from several angles. All the birds flew away. Her father leaned on a tree and watched them go. Later he was sitting on the ground.

I volunteered to drive him home. It wasn't pure altruism. I'm incapable of it. I said when I had turned his Oldsmobile, "Why did you say it was your fault, Mr. Green?"

He wasn't listening. Below the road four uniformed men were wrestling a heavy covered aluminum stretcher up the steep bank. Green watched them as he had watched the departing birds, until they were out of sight around a curve.

"She was so young," he said to the back seat.

I waited, and tried again. "Why did you blame yourself for her death?"

He roused himself from his daze. "Did I say that?"

"In the Highway Patrol office you said something of the sort."

He touched my arm. "I didn't mean I killed her."

"I didn't think you meant that. I'm interested in finding out who did."

"Are you a cop—a policeman?"

"I have been."

"You're not with the locals."

"No. I happen to be a private detective from Los Angeles. The name is Archer."

He sat and pondered this information. Below and ahead the summer sea brimmed up in the mouth of the canyon.

"You don't think the old tramp did her in?" Green said.

"It's hard to figure out how he could have. He's a strong-looking old buzzard, but he couldn't have carried her all the way up from the beach. And she wouldn't have come along with him of her own accord."

It was a question, in a way.

"I don't know," her father said. "Ginnie was a little wild—she'd do a thing *because* it was wrong, *because* it was dangerous. She hated to turn down a dare, especially from a man."

"There were men in her life?"

"She was attractive to men. You saw her, even as she is." He gulped. "Don't get me wrong. Ginnie was never a *bad* girl. She was a little headstrong, and I made mistakes: That's why I blame myself."

"What sort of mistakes, Mr. Green?"

"All the usual ones, and some I made up on my own." His voice was bitter. "Ginnie didn't have a mother, you see. Her mother left me years ago, and it was as much my fault as hers. I tried to bring her up myself. I didn't give her proper supervision. I run a restaurant in town, and I don't get home nights till after midnight. Ginnie was pretty much on her own since she was in grade school. We got along fine when I was there, but I usually wasn't there."

"The worst mistake I made was letting her work in the restaurant over the weekends. That started about a year ago. She wanted the money for clothes, and I thought the discipline would be good for her. I thought I could keep an eye on her, you know. But it didn't work out. She grew up too fast, and the night work played hell with her studies."

"I finally got the word from the school authorities. I fired her a couple of months ago, but I guess it was too late. We haven't been getting along too well since then. Mr. Connor said she resented my indecision, that I gave her too much responsibility and then took it away again."

"You've talked her over with Connor?"

"More than once, including last night. He was her academic counselor, and he was concerned about her grades. We both were. Ginnie finally pulled through, after all, thanks to him. She was going to graduate. Not that it matters now, of course."

Green was silent for a time. The sea expanded below us like a second blue dawn. I could hear the roar of the highway. Green touched my elbow again, as if he needed human contact.

"I oughtn't to've blown my top at Connor. He's a decent boy, he means well. He gave my daughter hours of free tutoring this last month. And he's got troubles of his own, like he said."

"What troubles?"

"I happen to know his wife left him, same as mine. I shouldn't have borne down so hard on him. I have a lousy temper, always have had." He hesitated, then blurted out as if he had found a confessor, "I said a terrible thing to Ginnie at supper last night. She always has supper with me at the restaurant. I said if she wasn't home when I got home last night that I'd wring her neck."

"And she wasn't home," I said. And somebody wrung her neck, I didn't say.

The light at the highway was red. I glanced at Green. Tear tracks glistened like snail tracks on his face.

"Tell me what happened last night."

"There isn't anything much to tell," he said. "I got to the house about twelve thirty, and, like you said, she wasn't home. So I called Al Brocco's house. He's my night cook, and I knew his youngest daughter Alice was at the moonlight party on the beach. Alice was home all right."

"Did you talk to Alice?"

"She was in bed asleep. Al woke her up, but I didn't talk to her. She told him she didn't know where Ginnie was. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. Finally I got up and called Mr. Connor. That was about one thirty. I thought I should get in touch with the authorities, but he said no, Ginnie had enough black marks against her already. He came over to the house and we waited for a while and then we went down to Cavern Beach."

"There was no trace of her. I said it was time to call in the authorities, and he agreed. We went to his beach house, because it was nearer, and called the sheriff's office from there. We went back to the beach with a couple of flashlights and went through

the caves. He stayed with me all night. I givé him that."

"Where are these caves?"

"We'll pass them in a minute. I'll show you if you want. But there's nothing in any of the three of them."

Nothing but shadows and empty beer cans, the odor of rotting kelp. I got sand in my shoes and sweat under my collar. The sun dazzled my eyes when I half walked, half crawled, from the last cave.

Green was waiting beside a heap of ashes.

"This is where they had the wienie roast," he said.

I kicked the ashes. A half-burned sausage rolled along the sand. Sand fleas hopping in the sun like fat on a griddle. Green and I faced each other over the dead fire. He looked out to sea. A seal's face floated like a small black nose cone beyond the breakers. Farther out a water skier slid between unfolding wings of spray.

Away up the beach two people were walking toward us. They were small and lonely and distinct as Chirico figures in the long white distance.

Green squinted against the sun. Red-rimmed or not, his eyes were good. "I believe that's Mr. Connor. I wonder who the woman is with him."

They were walking as close as lovers, just above the white margin of the surf. They pulled apart when they noticed us, but they were still holding hands as they approached.

"It's Mrs. Connor," Green said in a low voice.

"I thought you said she left him."

"That's what he told me last night. She took off on him a couple of weeks ago, couldn't stand a high school teacher's hours. She must have changed her mind."

She looked as though she had a mind to change. She was a hard-faced blonde who walked like a man. A certain amount of style took the curse off her stiff angularity. She had on a madras shirt, mannishly cut, and a pair of Capri pants that hugged her long slim legs.

Connor looked at us in complex embarrassment. "I thought it was you from a distance, Mr. Green. I don't believe you know my wife."

"I've seen her in my place of business." He explained to the woman, "I run the Highway Restaurant in town."

"How do you do," she said aloofly, then added in an entirely different voice, "You're Virginia's father, aren't you? I'm so sorry."

The words sounded queer. Perhaps it was the surroundings: the ashes on the beach, the entrances to the caves, the sea, and the empty sky which dwarfed us all. Green answered her solemnly..

"Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Connor was a strong right arm to me last night, I can tell you." He was apologizing. And Connor responded, "Why don't you come to our place for a drink? It's just down the beach. You look as if you could use one, Mr. Green. You too," he said to me. "I don't believe I know your name."

"Archer. Lew Archer."

He gave me a hard hand. His wife interposed, "I'm sure Mr. Green and his friend won't want to be bothered with us on a day like this. Besides, it isn't even noon yet, Frank."

She was the one who didn't want to be bothered. We stood around for a minute, exchanging grim, nonsensical comments on the beauty of the day. Then she led Connor back in the direction they had come from. Private Property, her attitude seemed to say: Trespassers will be fresh-frozen.

I drove Green to the Highway Patrol station. He said that he was feeling better, and could make it home from there by himself. He thanked me profusely for being a friend in need to him, as he put it. He followed me to the door of the station, thanking me.

The dispatcher was cleaning her fingernails with an ivory-handled file. She glanced up.

"Did they catch him yet?"

"I was going to ask you the same question, Miss Brocco."

"No such luck. But they'll get him," she said with female vindictiveness. "The sheriff called out his air squadron, and he sent to Ventura for bloodhounds."

"Big deal."

She bridled. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't think the old man of the mountain killed her. If he had, he wouldn't have waited till this morning to go on the lam. He'd have taken off right away."

"Then why did he go on the lam at all?" The word sounded strange in her prim mouth.

"I think he saw me discover the body, and realized he'd be blamed."

She considered this, bending the long nail file between her fingers. "If the old tramp didn't do it, who did?"

"You may be able to help me answer that question."

"Me help you? How?"

"You know Frank Connor, for one thing."

"I know him. I've seen him about my sister's grades a few times."

"You don't seem to like him much."

"I don't like him, I don't dislike him. He's just blah to me."

"Why? What's the matter with him?"

Her tight mouth quivered, and let out words. "I don't know what's the matter with him. He can't keep his hands off of young girls."

"How do you know that?"

"I heard it."

"From your sister Alice?"

"Yes. The rumor was going around the school, she said."

"Did the rumor involve Ginnie Green?"

She nodded. Her eyes were as black as fingerprint ink.

"Is that why Connor's wife left him?"

"I wouldn't know about that. I never even laid eyes on Mrs. Connor."

"You haven't been missing much."

There was a yell outside, a kind of choked ululation. It sounded as much like an animal as a man. It was Green. When I reached the door, he was climbing out of his convertible with a heavy blue-revolver in his hand.

"I saw the killer," he cried out exultantly.

"Where?"

He waved the revolver toward the lumberyard across the road. "He poked his head up behind that pile of white pine. When he saw me, he ran like a deer. I'm going to get him."

"No. Give me the gun."

"Why? I got a license to carry it. And use it."

He started across the four-lane highway, dodging through the moving patterns of the Sunday traffic as if he were playing parcheesi on the kitchen table at home. The sounds of brakes and curses split the air. He had scrambled over the locked gate of the yard before I got to it. I went over after him.

Green disappeared behind a pile of lumber. I turned the corner and saw him running halfway down a long aisle walled with stacked wood and floored with beaten earth. The old man of the mountain was running ahead of him. His white hair blew in the wind of his own movement. A burlap sack bounced on his shoulders like a load of sorrow and shame.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Green cried.

The old man ran on as if the devil himself were after him. He came to a cyclone fence, discarded his sack, and tried to climb it. He almost got over. Three strands of barbed wire along the top of the fence caught and held him struggling.

I heard a tearing sound, and then the sound of a shot. The huge old body espaliered on the fence twitched and went limp, fell heavily to the earth. Green stood over him breathing through his teeth.

I pushed him out of the way. The old man was alive, though there was blood in his mouth. He spat it onto his chin when I lifted his head.

"You shouldn't ought to of done it. I come to turn myself in. Then I got ascairt."

"Why were you scared?"

"I watched you uncover the little girl in the leaves. I knew I'd be blamed. I'm one of the chosen. They always blame the chosen. I been in trouble before."

"Trouble with girls?" At my shoulder Green was grinning terribly.

"Trouble with cops."

"For killing people?" Green said.

"For preaching on the street without a license. The voice told me to preach to the tribes of the wicked. And the voice told me this morning to come in and give my testimony."

"What voice?"

"The great voice." His voice was little and weak. He coughed red.

"He's as crazy as a bedbug," Green said.

"Shut up." I turned back to the dying man. "What testimony do you have to give?"

"About the car I seen. It woke me up in the middle of the night, stopped in the road below my sanctuary."

"What kind of car?"

"I don't know cars. I think it was one of them foreign cars. It made a noise to wake the dead."

"Did you see who was driving it?"

"No. I didn't go near. I was ascairt."

"What time was this car in the road?"

"I don't keep track of time. The moon was down behind the trees."

Those were his final words. He looked up at the sky with his sky-colored eyes, straight into the sun. His eyes changed color.

Green said, "Don't tell them. If you do, I'll make a liar out of you. I'm a respected citizen in this town. I got a business to lose. And they'll believe me ahead of you, mister."

"Shut up."

He couldn't. "The old fellow was lying, anyway. You know that. You heard him say yourself that he heard voices. That proves he's a psycho. He's a psycho killer. I shot him down like you would a mad dog, and I did right."

He waved the revolver.

"You did wrong, Green, and you know it. Give me that gun before it kills somebody else."

He thrust it into my hand suddenly. I unloaded it, breaking my fingernails in the process, and handed it back to him empty. He nudged up against me.

"Listen, maybe I did do wrong. I had provocation. It doesn't have to get out. I got a business to lose."

He fumbled in his hip pocket and brought out a thick sharkskin wallet. "Here. I can pay you good money. You say that you're a private eye; you know how to keep your lip buttoned."

I walked away and left him blabbering beside the body of the man he had killed. They were both vicious, in a sense, but only one of them had blood on his hands.

Miss Brocco was in the HP parking lot. Her bosom was jumping with excitement.

"I heard a shot."

"Green shot the old man. Dead. You better send in for the meat wagon and call off your bloody dogs."

The words hit her like slaps. She raised her hand to her face, defensively. "Are you mad at me? Why are you mad at me?"

"I'm mad at everybody."

"You still don't think he did it."

"I know damned well he didn't. I want to talk to your sister."

"Alice? What for?"

"Information. She was on the beach with Ginnie Green last night. She may be able to tell me something."

"You leave Alice alone."

"I'll treat her gently. Where do you live?"

"I don't want my little sister dragged into this filthy mess."

"All I want to know is who Ginnie paired off with."

"I'll ask Alice. I'll tell you."

"Come on, Miss Brocco, we're wasting time. I don't need your permission to talk to your sister, after all. I can get the address out of the phone book if I have to."

She flared up then and then flared down.

"You win. We live on Orlando Street, 224. That's on the other side of town. You will be nice to Alice, won't you? She's bothered enough as it is about Ginnie's death."

"She really was a friend of Ginnie's, then?"

"Yes. I tried to break it up. But you know how kids are—two motherless girls, they stick together. I tried to be like a mother to Alice."

"What happened to your own mother?"

"Father—I mean, she died." A greenish pallor invaded her face and turned it to old bronze. "Please. I don't want to talk about it. I was only a kid when she died."

She went back to her muttering radios. She was quite a woman, I thought as I drove away. Nubile but unmarried, probably full of untapped Mediterranean passions. If she worked an eight-hour shift and started at eight, she'd be getting off about four.

It wasn't a large town, and it wasn't far across it. The highway doubled as its main street. I passed the Union High School. On the green playing field beside it a lot of kids in mortarboards and gowns were rehearsing their graduation exercises. A kind of pall seemed to hang over the field. Perhaps it was in my mind.

Farther along the street I passed Green's Highway Restaurant. A dozen cars stood in its parking space. A couple of white-uniformed waitresses were scooting around behind the plate-glass windows.

Orlando Street was a lower-middle-class residential street bisected by the highway. Jacaranda trees bloomed like low small purple clouds among its stucco and frame cottages. Fallen purple petals carpeted the narrow lawn in front of the Brocco house.

A thin dark man, wiry under his T-shirt, was washing a small red Fiat in the driveway beside the front porch. He must have been over fifty, but his long hair was as black as an Indian's. His Sicilian nose was humped in the middle by an old break.

"Mr. Brocco?"

"That's me."

"Is Alice home?"

"She's home."

"I'd like to speak to her."

He turned off his hose, pointing its dripping nozzle at me like a gun.

"You're a little old for her, ain't you?"

"I'm a detective investigating the death of Ginnie Green."

"Alice don't know nothing about that."

"I've just been talking to your older daughter at the Highway Patrol office. She thinks Alice may know something."

He shifted on his feet. "Well, if Anita says it's all right."

"It's okay, Dad," a girl said from the front door. "Anita just called me on the telephone. Come in, Mister—Archer, isn't it?"

"Archer."

She opened the screen door for me. It opened directly into a small square living room containing worn green frieze furniture and a television set which the girl switched off. She was a handsome, serious-looking girl, a younger version of her sister with ten years and ten pounds subtracted and a pony tail added. She sat down gravely on the edge of the chair, waving her hand at the chesterfield. Her movements were languid. There were blue depressions under her eyes. Her face was sallow.

"What kind of questions do you want to ask me? My sister didn't say."

"Who was Ginnie with last night?"

"Nobody. I mean, she was with me. She didn't make out with any of the boys." She glanced from me to the blind television set, as if she felt caught between. "It said on the television that she was with a man, that there was medical evidence to prove it. But I didn't see her with no man. Any man."

"Did Ginnie go with men?"

She shook her head. Her pony tail switched and hung limp. She was close to tears.

"You told Anita she did."

"I did not!"

"Your sister wouldn't lie. You passed on a rumor to her—a high school rumor that Ginnie had had something to do with one man in particular."

The girl was watching my face in fascination. Her eyes were like a bird's eyes, bright and shallow and fearful.

"Was the rumor true?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "How would I know?"

"You were good friends with Ginnie."

"Yes, I was." Her voice broke on the past tense. "She was a real nice kid, even if she was kind of boy crazy."

"She was boy crazy, but she didn't make out with any of the boys last night?"

"Not while I was there."

"Did she make out with Mr. Connor?"

"No. He wasn't there. He went away. He said he was going home. He lives up the beach."

"What did Ginnie do?"

"I don't know. I didn't notice."

"You said she was with you. Was she with you all evening?"

"Yes." Her face was agonized. "I mean no."

"Did Ginnie go away, too?"

She nodded.

"In the same direction Mr. Connor took? Toward his house?"  
Her head moved almost imperceptibly downward.

"What time was that, Alice?"

"About eleven o'clock, I guess."

"And Ginnie never came back from Mr. Connor's house?"

"I don't know. I don't know for certain that she went there."

"But Ginnie and Mr. Connor were good friends?"

"I guess so."

"How good? Like a boy friend and a girl friend?"

She sat mute, her birdlike stare unblinking.

"Tell me, Alice."

"I'm afraid."

"Afraid of Mr. Connor?"

"No. Not him."

"Has someone threatened you—told you not to talk?"

Her head moved in another barely perceptible nod.

"Who threatened you, Alice? You'd better tell me for your own protection. Whoever did threaten you is probably a murderer."

She burst into frantic tears. Brocco came to the door.

"What goes on in here?"

"Your daughter is upset. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, and I know who upset her. You better get out of here or you'll be sorrier."

He opened the screen door and held it open, his head poised like a dark and broken ax. I went out past him. He spat after me. The Broccos were a very emotional family.

I started back toward Connor's beach house on the south side of town but ran into a diversion on the way. Green's car was parked in the lot beside his restaurant. I went in.

The place smelled of grease. It was almost full of late Sunday lunchers seated in booths and at the U-shaped breakfast bar in the middle. Green himself was sitting on a stool behind the cash register counting money. He was counting it as if his life and his hope of heaven depended on the colored paper in his hands.

He looked up, smiling loosely and vaguely. "Yes, sir?" Then he recognized me. His face went through a quick series of transformations and settled for a kind of boozy shame. "I know I shouldn't be here working on a day like this. But it keeps my mind off my troubles. Besides, they steal you blind if you don't watch 'em. And I'll be needing the money."

"What for, Mr. Green?"

"The trial." He spoke the word as if it gave him a bitter satisfaction.

"Whose trial?"

"Mine. I told the sheriff what the old guy said. And what I did. I know what I did. I shot him down like a dog, and I had no right to. I was crazy with my sorrow, you might say."

He was less crazy now. The shame in his eyes was clearing. But the sorrow was still there in their depths.

"I'm glad you told the truth, Mr. Green."

"So am I. It doesn't help him, and it doesn't bring Ginnie back. But at least I can live with myself."

"Speaking of Ginnie," I said. "Was she seeing quite a lot of Frank Connor?"

"Yeah. I guess you could say so. He came over to help her with her studies quite a few times. At the house, and at the library. He didn't charge me, either."

"That was nice of him. Was Ginnie fond of Connor?"

"Sure she was. She thought very highly of Mr. Connor."

"Was she in love with him?"

"In love? Hell, I never thought of anything like that. Why?"

"Did she have dates with Connor?"

"Not to my knowledge," he said. "If she did, she must have done it behind my back." His eyes narrowed to two red swollen slits. "You think Frank Connor had something to do with her death?"

"It's a possibility. Don't go into a sweat now. You know where that gets you."

"Don't worry. But what about this Connor? Did you get something on him? I thought he was acting queer last night."

"Queer in what way?"

"Well, he was pretty tight when he came to the house. I gave him a stiff snort, and that straightened him out for a while. But later on, down on the beach, he got almost hysterical. He was running around like a rooster with his head chopped off."

"Is he a heavy drinker?"

"I wouldn't know. I never saw him drink before last night at my house." Green narrowed his eyes. "But he tossed down a triple bourbon like it was water. And remember this morning, he offered us a drink on the beach. A drink in the morning, that isn't the usual thing, especially for a high school teacher."

"I noticed that."

"What else have you been noticing?"

"We won't go into it now," I said. "I don't want to ruin a man unless and until I'm sure he's got it coming."

He sat on his stool with his head down. Thought moved murkily under his knitted brows. His glance fell on the money in his hands. He was counting tens.

"Listen, Mr. Archer. You're working on this case on your own, aren't you? For free?"

"So far."

"So go to work for me. Nail Connor for me and I'll pay you whatever you ask."

"Not so fast," I said. "We don't know that Connor is guilty. There are other possibilities."

"Such as?"

"If I tell you, can I trust you not to go on a shooting spree?"

"Don't worry," he repeated. "I've had that."

"Where's your revolver?"

"I turned it in to Sheriff Pearsall. He asked for it."

We were interrupted by a family group getting up from one of the booths. They gave Green their money and their sympathy. When they were out of hearing, I said, "You mentioned that your daughter worked here in the restaurant for a while. Was Al Brocco working here at the same time?"

"Yeah. He's been my night cook for six-seven years. Al is a darned good cook. He trained as a chef on the Italian line." His slow mind, punchy with grief, did a double-take. "You wouldn't be saying that he messed around with Ginnie?"

"I'm asking you."

"Shucks, Al is old enough to be her father. He's all wrapped up in his own girls, Anita in particular. He worships the ground she walks on. She's the mainspring of that family."

"How did he get on with Ginnie?"

"Very well. They kidded back and forth. She was the only one who could ever make him smile. Al is a sad man, you know. He had a tragedy in his life."

"His wife's death?"

"It was worse than that," Green said. "Al Brocco killed his wife with his own hand. He caught her with another man and put a knife in her."

"And he's walking around loose?"

"The other man was a Mex," Green said in an explanatory way. "A wetback. He couldn't even talk the English language. The town hardly blamed Al, the jury gave him manslaughter. But when he got out of the pen, the people at the Pink Flamingo wouldn't give him his old job back—he used to be chef there. So I took him on. I felt sorry for his girls, I guess, and Al's been a good worker. A man doesn't do a thing like that twice, you know."

He did another slow mental double-take. His mouth hung open.

"Let's hope not."

"Listen here," he said. "You go to work for me, eh? You nail the guy, whoever he is. I'll pay you. I'll pay you now. How much do you want?"

I took a hundred dollars of his money and left him trying to comfort himself with the rest of it. The smell of grease stayed in my nostrils.

Connor's house clung to the edge of a low bluff about halfway between the HP station and the mouth of the canyon where the thing had begun: a semi-cantilevered redwood cottage with a closed double garage fronting the highway. From the grape stake-fenced patio in the angle between the garage and the front door a flight of wooden steps climbed to the flat roof which was railed as a sun deck. A second set of steps descended the fifteen or twenty feet to the beach.

I tripped on a pair of garden shears crossing the patio to the garage window. I peered into the interior twilight. Two things inside interested me: a dismasted flattie sitting on a trailer and a car. The sailboat interested me because its cordage resembled the

white rope that had strangled Ginnie. The car interested me because it was a low-slung Triumph two-seater.

I was planning to have a closer look at it when a woman's voice screeched overhead like a gull's, "What do you think you're doing?"

Mrs. Connor was leaning over the railing on the roof. Her hair was in curlers. She looked like a blonde Gorgon. I smiled up at her, the way that Greek whose name I don't remember must have smiled.

"Your husband invited me for a drink, remember? I don't know whether he gave me a rain check or not."

"He did not! Go away! My husband is sleeping!"

"Shh. You'll wake him up. You'll wake up the people in Forest Lawn."

She put her hand to her mouth. From the expression on her face she seemed to be biting her hand. She disappeared for a moment, and then came down the steps with a multicolored silk scarf over her curlers. The rest of her was sheathed in a white satin bathing suit. Against it her flesh looked like brown wood.

"You get out of here," she said. "Or I shall call the police."

"Fine. Call them. I've got nothing to hide."

"Are you implying that we have?"

"We'll see. Why did you leave your husband?"

"That's none of your business."

"I'm making it my business, Mrs. Connor. I'm a detective investigating the murder of Ginnie Green. Did you leave Frank on account of Ginnie Green?"

"No. No! I wasn't even aware—" Her hand went to her mouth again. She chewed on it some more.

"You weren't aware that Frank was having an affair with Ginnie Green?"

"He wasn't."

"So you say. Others say different."

"What others? Anita Brocco? You can't believe anything *that* woman says. Why, her own father is a murderer, everybody in town knows that."

"Your own husband may be another, Mrs. Connor. You might as well come clean with me."

"But I have nothing to tell you."

"You can tell me why you left him."

"That is a private matter, between Frank and me. It has noth-

ing to do with anybody but us." She was calming down, setting her moral forces in a stubborn, defensive posture.

"There's usually only the one reason."

"I had my reasons. I said they were none of your business. I chose for reasons of my own to spend a month with my parents in Long Beach."

"When did you come back?"

"This morning."

"Why this morning?"

"Frank called me. He said he needed me." She touched her thin breast absently, pathetically, as if perhaps she hadn't been needed in the past.

"Needed you for what?"

"As his wife," she said. "He said there might be tr—" Her hand went to her mouth again. She said around it, "Trouble."

"Did he name the kind of trouble?"

"No."

"What time did he call you?"

"Very early, around seven o'clock."

"That was more than an hour before I found Ginnie's body."

"He knew she was missing. He spent the whole night looking for her."

"Why would he do that, Mrs. Connor?"

"She was his student. He was fond of her. Besides, he was more or less responsible for her."

"Responsible for her death?"

"How dare you say a thing like that?"

"If he dared to do it, I can dare to say it."

"He didn't!" she cried. "Frank is a good man. He may have his faults, but he wouldn't kill anyone. I know him."

"What are his faults?"

"We won't discuss them."

"Then may I have a look in your garage?"

"What for? What are you looking for?"

"I'll know when I find it." I turned toward the garage door.

"You mustn't go in there," she said intensely. "Not without Frank's permission."

"Wake him up and we'll get his permission."

"I will not. He got no sleep last night."

"Then I'll just have a look without his permission."

"I'll kill you if you go in there."

She picked up the garden shears and brandished them at me—a sick-looking lioness defending her overgrown cub. The cub himself opened the front door of the cottage. He slouched in the doorway groggily, naked except for white shorts.

"What goes on, Stella?"

"This man has been making the most horrible accusations."

His blurred glance wavered between us and focused on her. "What did he say?"

"I won't repeat it."

"I will, Mr. Connor. I think you were Ginnie Green's lover, if that's the word. I think she followed you to this house last night, around midnight. I think she left it with a rope around her neck."

Connor's head jerked. He started to make a move in my direction. Something inhibited it, like an invisible leash. His body slanted toward me, static, all the muscles taut. It resembled an anatomy specimen with the skin off. Even his face seemed mostly bone and teeth.

I hoped he'd swing on me and let me hit him. He didn't. Stella Connor dropped the garden shears. They made a noise like the dull clank of doom.

"Aren't you going to deny it, Frank?"

"I didn't kill her. I swear I didn't. I admit that we—that we were together last night, Ginnie and I."

"Ginnie and I?" the woman repeated incredulously.

His head hung down. "I'm sorry, Stella, I didn't want to hurt you more than I have already. But it has to come out. I took up with the girl after you left. I was lonely and feeling sorry for myself. Ginnie kept hanging around. One night I drank too much and let it happen. It happened more than once. I was so flattered that a pretty young girl—"

"You fool!" she said in a deep harsh voice.

"Yes. I'm a moral fool. That's no surprise to you, is it?"

"I thought you respected your pupils, at least. You mean to say you brought her into our own house, into our own bed?"

"You'd left. It wasn't ours anymore. Besides, she came of her own accord. She wanted to come. She loved me."

She said with grinding contempt, "You poor groveling ninny. And to think you had the gall to ask me to come back here, to make you look respectable."

I cut in between them. "Was she here last night, Connor?"

"She was here. I didn't invite her. I wanted her to come, but I

dreaded it, too. I knew that I was taking an awful chance. I drank quite a bit to numb my conscience—”

“What conscience?” Stella Connor said.

“I have a conscience,” he said without looking at her. “You don’t know the hell I’ve been going through. After she came, after it happened last night, I drank myself unconscious.”

“Do you mean after you killed her?” I said.

“I didn’t kill her. When I passed out, she was perfectly all right. She was sitting up drinking a cup of instant coffee. The next thing I knew, hours later, her father was on the telephone and she was gone.”

“Are you trying to pull the old blackout alibi? You’ll have to do better than that.”

“I can’t. It’s the truth.”

“Let me into your garage.”

He seemed almost glad to be given an order, a chance for some activity. The garage wasn’t locked. He raised the overhead door and let the daylight into the interior. It smelled of paint. There were empty cans of marine paint on a bench beside the sailboat. Its hull gleamed virgin white.

“I painted my flattie last week,” he said inconsequentially.

“You do a lot of sailing?”

“I used to. Not much lately.”

“No,” his wife said from the doorway. “Frank changed his hobby to women. Wine and women.”

“Lay off, eh?” His voice was pleading.

She looked at him from a great and stony distance.

I walked around the boat, examining the cordage. The starboard jib line had been sheared off short. Comparing it with the port line, I found that the missing piece was approximately a yard long. That was the length of the piece of white rope that I was interested in.

“Hey!” Connor grabbed the end of the cut line. He fingered it as if it was a wound in his own flesh. “Who’s been messing with my lines? Did you cut it, Stella?”

“I never go near your blessed boat,” she said.

“I can tell you where the rest of that line is, Connor. A line of similar length and color and thickness was wrapped around Ginnie Green’s neck when I found her.”

“Surely you don’t believe I put it there?”

I tried to, but I couldn't. Small-boat sailors don't cut their jib lines, even when they're contemplating murder. And while Connor was clearly no genius, he was smart enough to have known that the line could easily be traced to him. Perhaps someone else had been equally smart.

I turned to Mrs. Connor. She was standing in the doorway with her legs apart. Her body was almost black against the daylight. Her eyes were hooded by the scarf on her head.

"What time did you get home, Mrs. Connor?"

"About ten o'clock this morning. I took a bus as soon as my husband called. But I'm in no position to give him an alibi."

"An alibi wasn't what I had in mind. I suggest another possibility—that you came home twice. You came home unexpectedly last night, saw the girl in the house with your husband, waited in the dark till the girl came out, waited with a piece of rope in your hands—a piece of rope you'd cut from your husband's boat in the hope of getting him punished for what he'd done to you. But the picture doesn't fit the frame, Mrs. Connor. A sailor like your husband wouldn't cut a piece of line from his own boat. And even in the heat of murder he wouldn't tie a granny's knot. His fingers would automatically tie a reef knot. That isn't true of a woman's fingers."

She held herself upright with one arm against the door frame.

"I wouldn't do anything like that. I wouldn't do that to Frank."

"Maybe you wouldn't in daylight, Mrs. Connor. Things have different shapes at midnight."

"And hell hath no fury like a woman scorned? Is that what you're thinking? You're wrong. I wasn't here last night. I was in bed in my father's house in Long Beach. I didn't even know about that girl and Frank."

"Then why did you leave him?"

"He was in love with another woman. He wanted to divorce me and marry her. But he was afraid—afraid that it would affect his position in town. He told me on the phone this morning that it was all over with the other woman. So I agreed to come back."

"He said that it was all over with Ginnie?"

Possibilities were racing through my mind. There was the possibility that Connor had been playing reverse English, deliberately and clumsily framing himself in order to be cleared.

"Not Ginnie," his wife said. "The other woman was Anita Brocco. He met her last spring in the course of work and fell in

love—what *he* calls in love. My husband is a foolish, fickle man."

"Please, Stella. I said it was all over between me and Anita."

She turned on him in quiet savagery. "What does it matter now? If it isn't one girl it's another. Any kind of female flesh will do to poultice your sick little ego."

Her cruelty struck inward and hurt her. She stretched out her hand toward him. Suddenly her eyes were blind with tears.

"Any flesh but mine, Frank," she said brokenly.

Connor paid no attention.

He said to me in a hushed voice, "My God, I never thought. I noticed her car last night when I was walking home."

"Whose car?"

"Anita's red Fiat. It was parked at the viewpoint a few hundred yards from here." He gestured vaguely toward town. "Later, when Ginnie was with me, I thought I heard someone in the garage. But I was too drunk to make a search." His eyes burned into mine. "You say a woman tied that knot?"

"All we can do is ask her."

We started toward my car together. His wife called after him, "Don't go, Frank. Let him handle it."

He hesitated, a weak man caught between opposing forces.

"I need you," she said. "We need each other."

I pushed him in her direction.

It was nearly four when I got to the HP station. The patrol cars had gathered like homing pigeons for the change in shift. Their uniformed drivers were talking and laughing inside.

Anita Brocco wasn't among them. A male dispatcher, a fat-faced man with pimples, had taken her place behind the counter.

"Where's Miss Brocco?" I asked.

"In the Ladies' Room. Her father will pick her up any minute."

She came out wearing lipstick and a light beige coat. Her face turned beige when she saw my face. She came toward me in slow motion, leaned with both hands flat on the counter. Her lipstick looked like fresh blood on a corpse.

"You're a handsome woman, Anita," I said. "Too bad about you."

"Too bad." It was half a statement and half a question. She looked down at her hands.

"Your fingernails are clean now. They were dirty this morning. You were digging in the dirt in the dark last night, weren't you?"

"No."

"You were, though. You saw them together and you couldn't stand it. You waited in ambush with a rope, and put it around her neck. Around your own neck, too."

She touched her neck. The talk and laughter had subsided around us. I could hear the tick of the clock again, and the muttering signals coming in from inner space.

"What did you use to cut the rope? The garden shears?"

Her red mouth groped for words and found them. "I was crazy about him. She took him away. It was all over before it started. I didn't know what to do with myself. I wanted him to suffer."

"He's suffering. He's going to suffer more."

"He deserves to. He was the only man—" She shrugged in a twisted way and looked down at her breast. "I didn't want to kill her, but when I saw them together—I saw them through the window. I saw her take off her clothes and put them on. Then I thought of the night my father—when he—when there was all the blood in Mother's bed. I had to wash it out of the sheets."

The men around me were murmuring. One of them, a sergeant, raised his voice.

"Did you kill Ginnie Green?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready to make a statement?" I said.

"Yes. I'll talk to Sheriff Pearsall. I don't want to talk here, in front of my friends." She looked around doubtfully.

"I'll take you downtown."

"Wait a minute." She glanced once more at her empty hands. "I left my purse in the—in the back room. I'll go and get it."

She crossed the office like a zombie, opened a plain door, closed it behind her. She didn't come out. After a while we broke the lock and went in after her.

Her body was cramped on the narrow floor. The ivory-handled nail file lay by her right hand. There were bloody holes in her white blouse and in the white breast under it. One of them had gone as deep as her heart.

Later Al Brocco drove up in her Fiat and came into the station.

"I'm a little late," he said to the room in general. "Anita wanted me to give her car a good cleaning. Where is she, anyway?"

The sergeant cleared his throat to answer Brocco.

All us poor creatures, as the old man of the mountain had said that morning.

# **Jacob Hay**

## **The K. Mission**

*Remember Dagbur Agradamian, the secret agent known as Mr. Omega who made his debut in the March 1968 issue of EQMM? Well; Dag is back—which suggests that his creator, Jacob Hay, has decided to write a series about the huge bearded oil magnate.*

*Agradamian is a counterespionage agent with a unique "cover": to the world he is a multimillionaire playboy with the flamboyant knack of living like a rajah. Except that it's no fake! He really is the world-famous tycoon that the international society columns say he is! But for purposes of undercover operations, Agradamian has a quality even more important than his wealth and influence and power: he has "a genius for the irregular" . . .*

**Agent: MR. OMEGA (Dagbur Agradamian)**

### *Agradamian Does It Again!*

**C**hicago, Dec. 1, Inter-Press—Dagbur Agradamian, the fabulously wealthy British oil magnate, stunned financial circles here and in New York by a near-miraculous surprise appearance at the annual meeting of Eurasian Petroleum where he successfully prevented a take-over by Imperial Holdings, Inc., and safely preserved his own close control of Eurasian Petroleum.

How the hugely bearded, always impeccably attired—a gardenia in his lapel is his trademark—multimillionaire managed to escape the attentions of reporters remains a mystery. Financial observers here declared that if word of his coming had gotten out, Imperial Holdings might have obtained the necessary bank assurances to insure his defeat. As it was, Imperial was caught with its guard down, and Agradamian added another victory to his long list of business triumphs.

Long a flamboyantly elegant figure in British business and society, Agradamian is known, however, to have a passion for personal privacy, and in this respect has been compared with American multimillionaire Howard Hughes. He declined to discuss any details of his astonishing appearance here, and has again vanished to one or another of the several homes he maintains in Britain and on the Continent.

Reading the dispatch in his copy of *The Telegraph*, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard Appleyard, R.N. (Ret.), known to his friends as "Boy," grinned cheerfully and took another eminently satisfactory swallow of his pint of John Courage in the saloon bar of The Gallant Sailorman, just off the High Street in Budleigh Salterton.

Omega had done it again. "Omega" was the name that the press had bestowed on Mr. Agradamian when it was considered amusing to describe one of his vast talents as "the living end, my dear," and the name had clung so tenaciously that, on one of the rare occasions in his career, Agradamian had bowed to popular fancy and caused to be painted on the gleaming white funnel of his gleaming white yacht a golden Greek omega. The same design was shortly applied to the far-flung fleet of Agradamian tankers.

Once, in the not too distant past, Mr. Omega had done a very personal favor for Boy Appleyard, before the latter's retirement from what is euphemistically called "a very sensitive post," and the two were old friends, dating their friendship from Dagbur Agradamian's wildly reckless and vastly effective days as a Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve corvette commander.

Actually, it is not entirely accurate to describe Sir Richard Appleyard as "retired"—not in the strict sense of the word. Men who have held jobs like his never really retire. They may give the appearance of lounging around lovely old country houses in shabby tweeds and doing a bit of pottering with the roses and having the odd pint at the local, but they remain in touch. Very much in touch, you may be sure.

This business of Agradamian in Chicago, now. How had one of the best-known figures in the world of international oil operations succeeded in penetrating to the American heartland without anyone being the wiser? Appleyard dismissed the idea of a chartered private plane. Nor would Agradamian have descended to disguise—assuming it were possible to do anything whatsoever with that great iron-gray spade beard and the ferocious mus-

taches that he wore in grave tribute to his Armenian ancestors. He would have died before shaving them off.

Yet only a few days before, the society pages of the London, Paris, and New York papers had Mr. Agradamian entertaining the cast of an American film company at his villa on Corfu.

Thoughtfully, Sir Richard tamped a battered black briar full of Rattray's. Clearly, his old friend must have traveled by air—but how? Almost certainly some greedy soul working in a plane-chartering service would have tipped off the newspapers, as would some crew member on a commercial flight. Of course, Agradamian might have his own plane, although this hardly seemed likely, since he hated to fly and had frequently declared so in public. Although, Appleyard mused, if it meant protecting his own vast empire, Dagbur Agradamian would venture into the jaws of hell without a second's hesitation. Dilettante and international playboy he might choose to appear—but a fool he most certainly wasn't.

Yet there was something here worth pondering, and Appleyard had been doing a lot of pondering since his last visit to London. Not only on the fact that somebody had at last managed to get a measure of decent heating into his old office, and that Miss Shaw-Jones had finally taken the giant step and got herself married. She'd been a damned fine secretary and would make some lucky chap a damned fine wife.

It was Hawker who had handed him the headache. Hawker was still vaguely embarrassed whenever he called his former superior Boy.

"This is a tricky one," Hawker said unhappily, "and we're stuck with it. What it amounts to is simple. On this coming January fifteenth, General Evgeny Kornetsov will be in West Berlin for some kind of memorial service for Russian troops killed in the battle there. He will, of course, be staying in East Berlin at the Russian headquarters—"

"Kornetsov?" Appleyard had interrupted. "The logistics genius, isn't he?"

Hawker nodded. "Precisely. No reason why, as one of the Russian army's senior top brass, he shouldn't attend a memorial service in West Berlin, of course, but that's not his real reason for being there. Instead, he's coming here to visit us."

"Here!" Appleyard was genuinely startled.

"You'll understand why when I explain the purpose of his visit.

What he's coming to discuss are the procedures for supplies from the West in the event of a war with China—how many transport aircraft might be available, what quantities of munitions, et cetera. The whole business has to be kept absolutely secret; if it leaked it might even precipitate the Chinese into a preventive war, which is the last thing any of us wants." Hawker smiled wanly. "Kornetsov won't hear of the meeting being held anywhere on the Continent. He seems to have formed a somewhat exaggerated admiration for our security measures. So now all we have to do is get him from West Berlin to England and back again, with no one the wiser."

"Why not a Russian plane, landing at one of our Air Force bases?" Appleyard countered. "Passenger in civvies descends, is hustled into the customary sinister black limousine, and is whisked off into the night."

"Bound to attract attention. Other ranks see; they go to pubs; they get to nattering. No, we've got to come up with some means of getting the package here and back, and so far nobody's come up with a solution. And time is running out."

A damned sticky situation, Appleyard thought as he drove his elderly Rover sedately away from The Gallant Sailorman toward the mellowed stone home a few miles inland, where his wife, Joan, would probably be readying tea. Turning into his lane he was dumfounded to see one of the more astonishing automobiles in the United Kingdom parked in his drive—Dagbur Agradamian's precisely authentic reproduction of a 1929 Duesenberg phaeton in British racing-green.

"Well, I'm damned," Appleyard muttered as he parked and walked swiftly into the house. There was no mistaking the great rumbling laugh coming from the library. This was positively eerie.

There was a bit more gray in the beard these days, but the big man was as imposing as ever, despite his country tweeds and boots. You would never mistake Mr. Omega for a gamekeeper.

"I've had a tiring few days in the States," Agradamian said as they shook hands, "so I thought I'd run down and impose on you and Joan for a bit of relaxation. This place always does wonders for my morale."

"By all means, Dag. But I confess that I'm astounded. You should be somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic by my reckoning. Apparently you've finally acquired a magic carpet."

Mr. Omega chuckled, pleased. "No magic, my dear Boy. Simple logistics."

At which point Joan Appleyard entered, followed by old Mrs. Wheelwright, bearing tea and her customary expression of solicitude for her mistress.

"Devonshire cream," cried Mr. Omega joyously. "The true food of the gods, I swear."

Thus it was not until after dinner, when Joan had gone upstairs to finish reading the latest in the series of detective novels of which she never seemed to tire, that Appleyard had the opportunity to discuss, in the most general of terms, his problem. Typically, Agradamian made no effort to probe deeper.

"So there it is, Dag. We've a very important Very Important Person to get from West Berlin to Ealingham Hall, which, as you probably don't know, is by way of being what's called a 'safe house,' staffed entirely by our own people, all of whom can be trusted absolutely."

"This Ealingham Hall—has it a courtyard?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. Quite a large one, too."

Mr. Agradamian nodded, his expression thoughtful. "That will be a help."

"Then you think it's possible?"

"Of course it's possible, Boy. Quite simple, really."

"But how?" There was a hint of exasperation in Appleyard's question, and Agradamian grinned.

"Why not let me take care of it?"

"You know quite well I can't ask you to undertake this sort of operation."

"You haven't asked. I've just volunteered. After all the dull financial types and their proxies I've been dealing with lately, a bit of sport would be just the thing."

"Dammit, Dag, this is not sport! It's a deadly serious affair —just how serious I can't begin to tell you."

"The more reason to succeed, then. My dear chap, I don't know who your VIP is, and I don't want to know. You say this meeting is scheduled for January sixteenth, one day after your person arrives in Berlin. That should present no problem—if he will be good enough to cooperate fully. You say there is to be a reception at the Grand Europe Hotel following this memorial ceremony. That would be at about four, shall we say? If your 'package,' as you keep calling him, can be at the tradesmen's delivery entrance

of the hotel at four thirty, we'll accommodate him."

This was terribly irregular, Appleyard thought, but Dagbur Agradamian had a genius for the irregular. Hawker would be desperately unhappy with the arrangement, and there was no point whatsoever in telling the Americans about the affair. The Americans operated by the book, and Mr. Omega wasn't in any book yet published, publicly or privately. But if Dagbur Agradamian could make himself vanish from view completely, perhaps he could do as much for somebody else.

"At precisely four thirty-five a large van will back up to the delivery entrance of the Berlin hotel. It will bear the legend *Nettleton's Glasswares* on its sides. The driver will come around to the back and open the rear doors. Meanwhile, his mate will enter the delivery way itself and set off a smoke bomb. In the ensuing seconds your package will enter the van which, naturally, will drive rapidly away to avoid catching fire. He will reappear in the courtyard of your Ealingham Hall," Mr. Omega concluded triumphantly.

Well, no one else had come up with an idea, Appleyard thought unhappily.

And what, he wondered, would the world think of one of its wealthiest capitalists going to the rescue of a Russian general? Not that the world would ever know, he hoped fervently, and if it ever did learn, it might not be around long enough to relish the irony.

As Appleyard had anticipated, Hawker was, to say the least, distressed when the bare bones of the scheme were presented to him.

"Confound it, man, do you suppose I would have come all the way from Devon to London if I didn't think there was a hope?" Appleyard finally exploded. "I grant you, Kornetsov has handed us a set of damn near impossible conditions, but think of the alternative—the possibility of a Red Chinese army looking across the Channel towards Dover."

"We're taking the very devil of a chance, you know."

"Do we have a choice?"

Hawker shrugged his concession.

"The finest Christmas present of my life," Mr. Agradamian boomed when Appleyard dropped by the sumptuous flat in Belgravia that the bearded giant called home when he was in London. Spence, his manservant, was pouring a bottle of a sweet

Armenian wine which Appleyard secretly disliked. "Have a glass of my sugar-water, Boy, and when this is all over I'll tell you how it all works."

"If it works," Appleyard replied soberly.

"It will," came the confident answer.

Appleyard spent a particularly wretched Christmas, made the more so by Joan's absence. They had planned to spend the holiday with their only daughter in Copenhagen, where she was married to a promising youngster with the British Embassy there. Appleyard insisted that Joan keep the date, and pleaded urgent business in Britain. With 25 years of marriage behind her, Joan had recognized the tone of his voice and hadn't argued.

Meantime, there was not a blessed word from Dagbur Agradamian during the difficult period of working out the details of General Kornetsov's visit with the Russians in Berlin; and the Russians, as usual, were difficult—even more so, in fact, since only one of them, the KGB station chief, knew the real nature of the situation. It is not every day that the Russian staff in Berlin is ordered to turn one of its army's top generals over to British Intelligence for a couple of days. To add to the difficulties, the Americans were getting restive. If the Kornetsov mission became known, it could mean even worse problems in Korea and Vietnam. Was this meeting really necessary?

Now the security precautions at Ealingham Hall, which stands in its own vast park in a part of the United Kingdom which need not concern us here, are such that only a microbe can penetrate freely; but these security precautions are largely invisible, since one does not wish to arouse the curiosity of one's neighbors. Much better that one's neighbors be under the impression that Ealingham Hall housed nothing more exciting than a Ministry of Agriculture Experimental Station. Under the circumstances, then, Appleyard had taken all the necessary steps to insure that should Mr. Agradamian's Duesenberg show itself at the gatekeeper's lodge it should be admitted immediately.

But at 11:00 P.M. on January 16th there was still no sign of Mr. Agradamian or his Duesenberg at Ealingham Hall. What there was a sign of was panic, subdued but very real. The handful of NATO officers who would brief General Kornetsov had arrived and were comfortably established in the library where a well-supplied bar was in operation, but of the Russian they had come to brief not a word.

Outside in the cobbled courtyard Hawker paced feverishly while Appleyard smoked his pipe in grim silence. Hawker was not the man to lower himself to an "I told you so," and Appleyard was not yet ready to concede that Mr. Omega had failed. The telegram had been unmistakable in its meaning when it had arrived at Appleyard's home that morning: EXPECT DELIVERY SHIPMENT NETTLETON'S GLASSWARES TODAY. Minutes later, Appleyard was pushing the elderly Rover hard across the British countryside in the direction of Ealingham Hall.

It was 11:45 P.M. when the gatekeeper at the Hall, whose worn corduroys belied his status as a sergeant of the Welsh Regiment, phoned that Nettleton's van had arrived. It was 11:48 P.M. when the big trailer rig rumbled into the courtyard and ground to a halt. Its engine fell silent and the driver climbed down and approached Hawker and Appleyard.

"Admiral Appleyard, sir?" Appleyard nodded. "Receipt, sir. If you'll just sign here." The driver held a flashlight over the flimsy form.

"Received from Nettleton's Glasswares one important package," Appleyard read, and for the first time in many days he grinned as he signed. Then, to his astonishment, the driver and his mate silently proceeded to unhitch the boxlike trailer and then drive off down the lane into the night. Now what the bloody hell?

At which juncture the rear double doors of the trailer swung silently open and Appleyard stared up from the dimly lighted courtyard to perceive that the trailer was full of plywood cartons. Even as he stared, the center tier of cartons swung smoothly outward and to one side. In the glowing rectangle of light that now appeared loomed the large figure of Dagbur Agradamian.

"Your package, gentlemen," he announced amiably, "and one of the finest gin-rummy players it's been my pleasure to meet." He jumped down from the trailer nimbly, as befitted a squash player in excellent condition, to make way for General Evgeny Kortetsov, who was wearing the sort of civilian suit that only Russian tailors seem able to produce.

While Hawker led the General into the vast entry hall of the manor house of Ealingham, Dagbur Agradamian hauled himself back aboard the trailer and led the fascinated Appleyard into its interior, which might have been mistaken for the mahogany-paneled owner's cabin of a luxurious motor cruiser, complete with an enclosed john and a minuscule electric galley. Along one side

was a comfortable-looking berth; ranged against the other were an armchair and a table. Several etchings adorned the windowless walls. As Appleyard gaped in amazement, Agradamian opened a cupboard and removed from their specially padded racks a bottle, with which he proceeded to do the proper things.

"Highly efficient, my dear Boy, wouldn't you say?" he asked genially, lifting his own glass.

"But you couldn't have driven—I mean, the time element—" Appleyard broke off.

"Of course I didn't drive, old son. I flew. Or, rather, I should say that we—you guest and I—were flown."

"Impossible! Not a trailer this size!"

"Not quite, actually. But this, Boy, is not really a trailer. It's what is called a 'container.' You should spend more time at Tilbury Docks, old son. Containers are all the rage these days." Mr. Omega took a satisfied sip of his brandy.

"What you do, in essence, is take a simple steel or aluminum box, twenty feet long, roughly eight feet wide and eight feet high, and load it up with whatever you choose at your factory. Then you put it aboard a flatcar, you see, ship it to the nearest docks or airport, send it wherever you choose by ship or plane, have it unloaded onto a freight car, and have it arrive intact wherever you want it to arrive.

"As you well know, I despise flying. Simply looking out of a plane's window, even when it's on the ground, gives me vertigo. But all passenger planes have windows. So when these containers began appearing on the scene a few years back, I sensed that here might be the solution to my problem, because it has become increasingly necessary for me to fly, yet at the same time avoiding the publicity involved, alas, with a commercial flight. What could be more comfortable, then, than a *personal* container?"

"What, indeed?" Appleyard murmured.

"But it is forbidden to commercial freight airlines to carry people, right? So the answer was to charter my own cargo plane. What could be more anonymous than the arrival of a cargo plane and its anonymous container? You understand, naturally, that this is no ordinary container: certain modifications were necessary, such as soundproofing—I cannot abide the noise of jet engines—emergency oxygen, provision for internal pressurization."

"But the expense must have been fantastic," Appleyard protested weakly.

"A trifle when you consider the results."

"So that was how you managed the Chicago business?"

Agradamian nodded happily. "I simply had myself shipped to Chicago. There's no messing about in air terminals when you fly air freight. All the comforts of home, and, apart from a few uncomfortable seconds during take-off, no vertigo, because there are no windows. I mix myself a drink, read an improving paperback detective novel, and hey, presto!—I arrive safe and sound. After which a bloody great forklift or something deposits my giant shoebox aboard a trailer and off we go."

"But emigration and customs—" Appleyard argued. "All the formalities, the regulations?"

"When it is convenient, these matters can be tactfully arranged, and quite legally. When it is not convenient—as, shall we say, this evening—well, again, these things can be arranged." Mr. Agradamian's smile would have made his Armenian ancestors proud.

"And when this conference is over—?" But Appleyard already knew the answer.

"Simple. *Nettleton's Glasswares* will make another delivery to the tradesmen's entrance of the Grand Europe Hotel in Berlin." Dagbur Agradamian's smile was beatific. "After which it might be best if *Nettleton's Glasswares* ceased to send its containerized cargoes to the Continent for a time. I think I could travel quite as comfortably as *Spooner's Marmalade*."

"D'you know, Dag," Appleyard said slowly as he finished the last sip of his brandy, "I'm damned glad you're on our side."

He would, Appleyard thought to himself as the brandy warmed his innards, have to get cracking with a memo to the right people: *Containers: Possibilities for Illegal Shipments and Suggestions for Prevention Thereof*.

No. On second thought, let the Customs people figure it out for themselves. They were, after all, expected to be abreast of all new developments in transportation. Meanwhile, Mr. Agradamian's container might prove quite useful. One had heard reports that the Rumanian deputy chief of counterespionage desired to defect to more tolerant climes. But did the Rumanians eat *that* much marmalade?

Appleyard was still chuckling when Hawker rejoined him in the courtyard. Above them loomed the dark, silent bulk of the container on its trailer. Mr. Agradamian had retired for the night.

# Hugh Pentecost

## Blood-Red in the Morning

*At the age of 22, Laura Gibney had every material advantage: a fabulously wealthy family; the highest social status; every luxury that money could buy. And yet—and yet... What is wrong in today's world? Why should Laura, with everything good (or seemingly good) to live for, run away from home and become a hippie?*

*Here is a contemporary short novel that throws light on our rebellious youth—why they are willing to give up so-called security and become outcasts, why they reject the so-called Establishment (not synonymous with Enlightenment) and its outmoded values... Let's all take a long hard look at the invisible part of the young people's iceberg, and even more important, let's all listen to what Laura, old for a hippie, has to tell us, especially that "crazy talk about Love and Peace"...*

*Another fascinating short novel complete in this anthology...*

**S**he wasn't where I hoped she would be, the place we had met for so many dawns so long ago. I stood by the swiftly moving stream and looked down at the literally hundreds of trout, anchored behind the rocks, some of them trying to fight their way upstream. Laura and I used to try to fish some of them out by hand, and more than once we succeeded.

When I was 16 and Laura was 15 we met here almost every fair summer morning. We had fishing rods, but mostly we didn't fish. I would bring sandwiches and she would bring a thermos of coffee or milk, depending on the weather, from the big stone house that frowned down on us from the hilltop.

We would sit together on the bank of the stream, without embarrassment, holding hands. The future was quite clear to both of us. I had a year of high school to finish, and then college. After

that we would be married, in spite of the stone house and all it stood for. We were irrevocably, totally, peacefully in love.

One morning when I met her in the gray dawn light she showed me a splinter she'd got in the palm of her hand. I tried to pry it loose with the small blade in what had been my Boy Scout knife. Our heads were close together. Suddenly we were looking at each other intently, her blue eyes very bright. I found it hard to breathe. She smelled like clover, like flowers, warm and sweet. And then she was in my arms for the first time, and then, without words or preamble, we were making love on the bank of the stream. It was the most natural thing in the world, because she and I were forever.

Later a shadow fell across us and I turned my head to see what it was. The Old Man was standing over us, like a colossus. He was about six feet five inches tall and 240 pounds of solid bone and muscle. He had a grizzled beard and mustache. In town we called him Big Daddy, after Tennessee Williams' character. He was what the big stone house stood for. He was Laura's father.

He picked me up by the back of the neck as though I were a bag of scrap. Holding me with one hand, he beat me with the other fist, back and forth, until the earth turned into a dark fog. Then he threw me on the ground. He was breathing hard—not from effort, but from pure rage.

"If I ever see you on this property again, John, I'll shoot you down in cold blood for trespassing," he roared at me.

I looked at Laura. She lay with her face buried in the dew-wet grass. What had been perfect had been turned into something shameful. I crawled away, over what seemed like miles of fields, and then under the white wooden fence that surrounded the property.

That was seven years ago.

Until three days ago I had not seen Laura again, except once or twice when she had been driven through town in the family Cadillac. I had written to her, but my letters had been returned, unopened, probably by the Old Man or some other member of the family. I had tried to phone her, but she was never at home. I had been too frightened to walk up to the front door of the stone house and demand to see her. I was just a kid.

I didn't blame the Old Man any more. Any father who found his fifteen-year-old daughter lying with a no-good neighborhood kid might have reacted as he had. He could have brought a legal ac-

tion against me, but he didn't because, I suppose, he didn't want any public scandal to touch Laura.

So I went on, through high school and college, and then into the Army and the jungles of Vietnam. There was never another girl who remotely interested me. Any kind of permanent relationship seemed impossible. I got a letter from my brother when I was only a few months away from my discharge. Secretly I didn't think I would live that long, but I did.

"You remember Laura Gibney?" my brother Eddie wrote. Did I remember her! "She flew the coop about two months ago—took off for Hippieville, I guess. The Old Man had the cops and private detectives and God-knows-who-else looking for her in New York. They finally found her in the East Village living in a pad with half a dozen long-haired goons. She refused to come home and they couldn't make her—she's over twenty-one. She's singing in some kind of night spot in the Village."

I couldn't believe it: Laura living in some dive with half a dozen men, divorced from the luxury and care she'd always had.

I did live out those months in Vietnam, I did get discharged from the Marine Corps, and I did wind up in New York, even before I went home to my family in Connecticut. I wanted to find Laura. She had been on my mind ever since the letter. I fancied myself some kind of hero who would save her from "a fate worse than death."

I had no great trouble finding her. She was singing in a supper club called The Night People's Thing. Her picture was in a glass frame outside the front door. She was singing when I first saw her, accompanying herself on a guitar. Her voice was sweet and clear, and somehow it got you by the throat. She was good.

Her long golden hair hung down her back, beautiful—older but beautiful. The place was crowded with kids, most of the boys long-haired and bearded, most of the girls miniskirted and bare-legged. All were intent on Laura and when she finished on a high plaintive note they stamped and applauded and demanded more. I didn't think she'd seen me, but she put down her guitar and came straight toward me where I was standing at the bar.

"Hello, Johnny," she said.

"Hi." It was a croaking sound.

"Strange accident, your coming in here," she said.

"It wasn't an accident."

"You were looking for me?" Her blue eyes had changed. They

were more sophisticated, wiser, hiding some kind of pain, I thought.

"Yes."

"I would think that was a mistake," she said.

"Can we go some place to talk?" I asked.

"I'm afraid not. I have two more shows to do. And I'm here with friends."

I saw a dark-bearded young man giving me the evil eye from a few yards away. My uniform marked me as part of the unthinkable Establishment.

"When, then?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know, Johnny." She sounded tired. "Shouldn't we skip it?"

"No."

"Do you expect to go up to your family's place in Lakeview?"

"After I've had a chance to talk to you," I said.

"Did you know I'd run-away from home?"

"Eddie wrote me."

"Saturday is my father's seventieth birthday. My mother has persuaded me to come home for the celebration. It's a mistake but—well, it means a great deal to her. I'm going to give it a try, but I may turn around and come straight back to town. But if I stay, and if you're in Lakeview, perhaps we could get together."

"Where? When?"

"I'll have to see," she said.

Then she was surrounded by admirers and they quickly crowded me out.

"See you around, Johnny," she called to me.

So that was that.

And now it was just a little after five on Sunday morning. I hadn't heard from her. I thought maybe she'd remember the old days and come to the old place; but she hadn't.

The August dawn was a blood-red, reminding me of the old doggerel about "Sailor take warning." I looked up at the stone house, four stories high, with its ironwork doorways, its terraces and verandas, its huge cupola in which a great brass bell reflected the first rays of the sun. She was there, or maybe she wasn't. It seemed impossible she wouldn't have sensed that this was the moment and the place for us to meet.

I walked up to the house, to the terrace that overlooked the sloping gardens. There were two especially grotesque gargoyles at

the ends of a stone wall, spewing water into a marble chute that emptied into a pool below. I stood on the wall to get a better view of the gardens which I hadn't seen for so long. —And I froze.

The water that ran down the chute was pure and clear, but the water in the pond at the bottom was clouded with the dark red of blood. Floating face down was the body of a man, naked except for a pair of swimming trunks. His hair waved away from his head like some sort of sea grass. There was a gaping red hole just below his left shoulder blade.

On the bank of the pond sat a girl. It was Laura, her blonde Alice-in-Wonderland hair hanging down her back and gleaming in the sunlight. She had on a flimsy thing in dark-blue polkadots that left her back bare and reached only halfway down her thighs. Her legs and feet were bare, and her knees were drawn up under her chin, her arms wrapped around them. She stared at the dead man without moving.

A yard or two away on the damp grass there was a large pair of pruning shears, the long-bladed kind used for cutting the boxwood hedges that surrounded the garden. The blades were stained. They had almost certainly been used to make that hole in the man's back.

"God Almighty!" I said, and jumped down off the wall.

I half ran, half slid down the grass bank to where Laura sat, her concentration on the dead man so intense that she didn't seem to hear my breathless arrival.

I squatted beside her, unable to speak, not daring to touch her. The dead man was a stranger to me. Blood still oozed slowly out of the hole in his back.

Then Laura turned her head toward me. She looked totally blank for a moment, as if she'd never seen me before in her life. Then her blue eyes widened and she recognized me. Two large tears ran down her cheeks. Her arms were suddenly around my neck, her wet cheek pressed hard against my cheek.

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny!" she whispered.

A voice like thunder seemed to shake the ground under us.

"Palmer! Johnny Palmer!"

I turned my head, still holding Laura close. She was crying softly. Up above us, standing on the wall between the two spitting gargoyles, was T. J. Gibney, the Old Man himself. He looked like some giant Gothic warrior. At that distance you would never have guessed his seventy years.

Let the old tyrant just try to manhandle me this time. I could break him into a dozen small pieces without half trying. I had learned how to fight to kill in the Marine Corps...

The Gibney mansion in Lakeview was built more than 130 years ago by T. J. Gibney's grandfather. It had been owned by only three men in that time: Horace Gibney who built it; Nathan Hale Gibney, Horace's oldest son; and Thomas Jefferson Gibney, Nathan's heir, who had, the night before that red August dawn, celebrated his 70th birthday.

The fabulous old house was a museum containing priceless paintings and sculptures, rugs and tapestries, along with carved paneling and huge marble-manteled fireplaces. The entrance hall alone was big enough for an inaugural ball. In an age of self-help, a small army of servants, indoor and outdoor servants, kept the house, the gardens, the outlying grounds in perfect condition. It was the last of something that belonged in another era.

When you think of vast fortunes in American history you conjure up such names as Carnegie, Mellon, Astor, Morgan, Rockefeller, Ford. And Gibney. The Gibneys had gone West in covered wagons, had become cattle barons, had found oil under their grazing lands, had bought more and more land—and then industries and portions of great cities and patents and processes. And now there was The Gibney Foundation, which supported research in science and medicine, which underwrote the creative arts in a hundred cities, and which was devoted to urban redevelopment—paying for the cost of obliterating city slums and replacing them with decent modern housing.

And that was far from all. There were hospitals that bore the Gibney name, and clinics and laboratories. To God they had contributed everything from stained-glass windows to whole cathedrals. Publicly the name of T. J. Gibney was associated with goodness, charity, and compassion. And T.J. had a public-relations man whose only job was to keep that image intact.

Privately, and particularly in our small town, we knew T.J. to be a shrewd, cruel, hard-drinking, lusty old buzzard. There were a lot of people who admired just those qualities in him. Huge fortunes are not amassed and increased without violence, ruthlessness, and even treachery. The Gibneys had apologized to the people they'd crushed along the way by building hospitals to take care of their families.

I think what I had come to hate most about T. J. Gibney was not so much the way his family had amassed its fortune. That kind of thing was part of our pioneer history. It was how he used the power that went with great wealth. Maybe I should have thought he had treated me with some leniency seven years ago. From his point of view a beating was a small price for me to have paid. From my point of view—well, there had been no hearing, no chance to explain that Laura and I had not been involved in some cheap affair, no chance to explain that we were truly in love.

It had been simple for him to make any further contact between Laura and me impossible. He had servants who were paid well to make sure he had his way. He could pay a man in six figures to make his public image warm and lovable. And he could buy his way out of any jam he might ever get into . . .

As he started down the path toward where I sat on the edge of the pool with Laura in my arms I felt like shouting at him, "How are you going to buy your way out of this one, Old Man?"

Do you know that it never occurred to me that Laura could be involved? No, not Laura.

"What happened?" I asked her.

She shook her head from side to side, unable to speak because of what was now convulsive sobbing.

As the clean water came into the pond from the marble chute, the bloody film seemed to drift away from the dead man toward the outlet at the far end.

The Old Man came across the lawn toward us. He towered over me and for a moment all my adolescent fears of him rose up in me. He was Power. He was Authority.

"The last time you were on my land, John," he said in a shaking voice, "I told you what I would do if you ever came back. Just one thing. Did Laura invite you here?"

"No, sir," I said. I had learned to say "sir" automatically since our last meeting.

"You came here uninvited?"

"Have you looked in the pond, sir?"

"What about the pond?" He turned, and suddenly he turned to stone. After a long moment he looked back at me and his mouth had gone slack. "What happened?"

"I don't know, sir," I said, still holding the sobbing girl in my arms. "I only got here seconds before you called out to me. If you let Laura get hold of herself she should be able to tell us."

"Laura!" he shouted.

"Don't yell at her," I said.

He gave me an odd look as though he couldn't believe I had the nerve to give him orders. I put my head down and whispered to Laura, "We have to know, baby. We have to know what happened."

I could feel her whole body go tense as she struggled for control. Finally she lifted her tear-stained face, making no effort to get out of my embrace.

"I don't know, Johnny," she said. She didn't look at the Old Man.

"You found him this way? You know who he is?"

"Of course she knows who he is," T.J. said. "He's Julian Traynor, a writer who's been living here for months and working on a history of the Gibney family. He's part of our household."

"I was coming to meet you, Johnny. I was going to the old place," Laura said, as if she hadn't heard T.J. "What time is it, Johnny?"

I could look at my wrist watch without taking my arm away from her. "A quarter to six," I said.

"Oh, my God!" she said, and began to shake again from head to foot.

"Easy," I said. "You can't start that all over again."

"I've lost an hour," she said.

T.J. and I looked at each other. We were suddenly allied in confusion.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I came out of the house about an hour ago," she said. "I planned to be at our meeting place a little before five—the way we always used to, Johnny. I came out onto the terrace and then—and then I was sitting on the edge of the pond here, looking at Julian."

"What did you see when you first came out on the terrace?"

She turned in my arms and her hands gripped the lapels of my blue linen jacket. "I don't know, Johnny. That's what I'm trying to tell you. I've lost an hour somewhere, I've drawn some kind of blank. I was on the terrace—and then I was sitting here."

"You expect me to believe that?" T.J. demanded.

"I don't expect anything from you, Father," Laura said. She put her face on my shoulder and the quiet weeping started again.

The Old Man straightened his massive shoulders. "Will you be

good enough to help me get Julian out of the water, John?"

"You shouldn't touch him, sir—or those garden shears. It's a matter for the police."

"Oh, God," he said. He turned to look at the body in the water again. "You're sure he's dead?"

"I've seen a lot of dead men in the last two years, sir."

He looked at me as though he were really seeing me for the first time in his life. "So you have," he said. He watched me stroking Laura's golden hair. I thought he had shrunk just a little. "You believe she's drawn some kind of a blank? Amnesia?"

"If she says so," I said. "Something else I've seen in the last two years—a lot of memory blocks like this. When a man has seen something too horrible to bear, the mind simply shuts off all the memory processes relating to it. It's not at all uncommon when people are being blown to pieces all around you. If Laura saw someone ram those shears through Traynor's body—"

He nodded slowly. "Will you try to get her up to the house?" he asked.

Believe it or not, I had been asked to help T. J. Gibney! I watched him walk up the path, his broad shoulders drooping. The big stone house seemed to have taken on a reddish tinge from the sunrise. And as I watched I saw a curl of black smoke rising from one of the half dozen chimneys. It must have been in the high seventies at six o'clock that morning. It was going to be a scorcher of a day. I thought: no matter what happened the orderly efficiency of the household would go on. Someone must be burning refuse from last night's party in the incinerator.

Laura seemed to have regained control. She slipped out of my arms and sat there, looking first at the body in the pool, then at me.

"Johnny, get out of here," she said suddenly. "Go as far away as you can. I should never have said I might see you. It's gone, it's dead, it's our lost childhood. It's Dreamsville."

"An every-day all-day dream," I said.

"Oh, Johnny!"

"I want to tell you something," I said. "I was involved with Intelligence in the Marine Corps in Vietnam. Part of my job was to debrief our commandos when they came back from a raid, and prisoners who had been rescued from the Vietcong forces. Every day I talked to men who'd been through some kind of unbelievably hell. What's happened to you—a lost hour, even lost days

—was a common thing. The mind provides a kind of anesthetic for the unbearable. You may not remember for a long time what you saw this morning."

"Oh, God." She covered her face with her hands.

"The harder you try, the more impenetrable the block is likely to be. So just take it easy. Sooner or later, unpleasant as it may prove to be, it will all come back to you. The police are apt to pressure you to remember. I'll try to get them to understand."

"The world isn't the way we thought it was, Johnny," she said. "It's nothing like what we thought. Go away, Johnny. Try to develop a block of your own. Forget you ever knew the Gibneys."

"I love you," I said, trying not to sound romantic. "I hope you're going to marry me."

Her body seemed to writhe inside that polkadot nothing she was wearing. She cried out, "No, Johnny! Oh, no, no, no!"

She sprang up, and before I could stop her she began to run barefoot up the path to the house. Above her the black curl of smoke from the chimney was subsiding. The sun was well up above the hills behind the house now, hot and oppressive. I could feel little trickles of sweat running down my back.

I looked down into the pool. A faint red froth seemed to float on the surface above the dead man.

Growing up is a strange business. Was it Mark Twain who said that as a boy he thought his father was a complete idiot, but by the time he was thirty he was surprised to realize how much his father had learned with the passing of the years?

The first time I thought I was grownup was that dawn by the trout stream when Laura and I discovered that we were in love. Right after that, when I'd crawled away whimpering, after the Old Man had beaten me, I knew I was still an inadequate kid. When I was 20 they put a rifle in my hands and sent me off to basic training and I thought: Now I am a man. But I learned I couldn't even vote and there were a lot of places where I couldn't even buy a drink. Some grownup!

And then I saw death and destruction—little children blown to pieces, old men and women burned to death; and I thought: you have to be grownup to see this and still retain your sanity. And then I thought: I couldn't be very grownup because I couldn't get it through my head exactly what we were fighting for. I couldn't think of any noble reasons for being in Asia where some sniper

whom I didn't know and who didn't know me, someone I had nothing against, was trying to blow my brains out from behind a rock. I knew what I was fighting for. I was fighting to survive—so I could come home and find Laura.

So I had come home, having started as a private and ended up as a Lieutenant with decorations and medals, and people on the streets of my town, seeing me in civilian clothes, said, "You're little Johnny Palmer, aren't you?" Grownup? I was still the same kid who lived with his mother and brother at the north end of Maple Road in Lakeview, Connecticut, U.S.A.

And Laura had run away from the simple mention of anything so grownup and adult as marriage.

In the pond a man lay, face down, his dead mouth open in the bloodstained water. He had been born, lived, grown up, and died. Or had he grown up? The thousands of dead people I'd seen in the last two years had all seemed so helpless, so childlike in death...

Someone was coming down the path now, a blond man wearing a yellow sports shirt, yellow slacks, and yellow sandals on bare feet. He had a magnificent tan. He moved with the lithe grace of a conditioned athlete.

I knew he was Bob Gibney, Laura's brother—the younger of T.J.'s two sons, but ten years older than Laura. Bob was what the townspeople called "a wild one," as opposed to his brother Emerson who was a church deacon and whose owlish spectacles made him look like a third-rate bookkeeper. Bob Gibney drove foreign sports cars, climbed mountains, and had been saved from a dozen scandals with women by T.J.'s pocketbook. He had finally married a girl he found dancing naked in a cage in a Hollywood discotheque. Sheila Connors had obviously played for higher stakes, people said at first. She wanted the works, not a payoff. But later people had changed their minds. Bob and Sheila were apparently devoted to each other. They were never separated. They dressed alike, strictly on the "mod" side. Someone had dubbed them "The Bobbsey Twins." But Bob Gibney hadn't settled down. He simply had a perpetual companion in his comet course across the sky.

He stopped at the edge of the pond, not looking at me for a few moments, and concentrated on the dead man.

"It took some strength to run those shears clean through him," he said.

"Frail people can generate a lot of strength if they're angry enough," I said.

Then he looked at me. He had the brightest blue eyes I can ever remember seeing—blue, laughing, heartless, I thought. "You said it, not me, brother," he said. "You're Johnny Palmer, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You seem to have chosen an unlucky moment to renew your love life," he said. "You see it happen?"

"No," I said.

"That's right, man," he said. "Keep saying no. Because anything you say can be used against you."

"Now look here, Mr. Gibney—" I began.

"Call me Bob," he said, grinning at me. "There's only one *Mister Gibney* around here—the Old Man." He looked back at the body and his eyes seemed to grow even brighter, as though they were being provided with a special excitement. He glanced at an expensive gold wrist watch. "The last time I saw him was less than three hours ago," he said. "He was laying seige to one of the better-looking broads of the evening. Oh, yes, Johnny, I was watching. There's a bit of the Peeping Tom in all males, wouldn't you say? That's why the new naked movies please us so much and outrage the lady critics. Oh, well, as the fellow said, 'What a way to go'—flushed with success, your manhood verified."

He fished a cigarette out of a shirt pocket and produced a gold lighter from his trousers pocket. He stared directly at me through the flame. "You should of stood in bed, kid," he said. "I think we should get up to the house. The fuzz will be along any minute."

"You're trying to tell me something," I said.

"A fact of life," he said. His smile was mockery. "You grew up in this town, didn't you, man? Then you know the Gibneys never take the rap for anything."

Someone hailed us from the top of the bank. It was startling, because it was Bob Gibney's double—or almost. Same yellow shirt and slacks and sandals, same lithe body; only the hair was different. It was cut almost the same. Bob wore his longish, with sideburns brushed back over his ears and a thick mane down his neck—but expertly cut and styled. I understand that kind of haircut costs about twenty-five bucks on Madison Avenue. Sheila Gibney's hair was styled the same way, but it was henna-red.

"I don't think I'll come down," she called out to us.

"Good idea," Bob said. "We're coming up, anyhow."

As we came close to her I saw that her eyes were bright, like her husband's, but cat-green. She looked at me quizzically. I've

been sized up by women before, and I knew I wasn't displeasing to her; but I also knew Bob would notice it, and I felt uncomfortable.

"You're Johnny Palmer, aren't you?" she said. "I'm Sheila."

"Hi," I said.

"Poor Julian," she sighed. "He was riding so high last night. What's this about Laura's sudden amnesia?"

"Shock," I said.

She gave a little shudder. "I think I'd like to head out of town, Bob. After all, they don't need us. We were together, so we alibi each other."

"That's why I married you," Bob said. "To have a perpetual alibi. No, we'll stick around and tell the cops what we were doing."

The green eyes widened. "You mean, blow by blow?"

Bob laughed. "That might constitute a delaying action," he said. "Seriously, we have to stay, Duck—for Lydia's sake. She'll need support while T.J. tells the cops how to do their job."

Lydia was Laura's mother. People had remarked in town how odd it was the two boys had always called her by her first name. But if you saw her riding one of her hunters over a stone wall, or driving her Ferrari around town, her blonde hair streaming out behind her, you'd take her to be of their generation and not of her own.

As we walked toward the house I saw that a white-coated servant was laying out a sort of buffet breakfast on the screened terrace that faced the spitting gargoyle. The whole family must be up by now, even though it was still only a quarter past six. Sheila was between Bob Gibney and me, and she ran her scarlet-tipped fingers along the sleeve of my jacket.

"A rough reunion for you, Johnny," she said.

"Not exactly what I'd hoped."

"Laura was expecting you?"

"Yes, she was expecting me."

"Too bad you waited so long, Johnny. Our Laura isn't exactly the girl you once made love to on a morning like this—what was it, six years ago?"

"Seven years ago, and what are you talking about?" I said.

"Oh, come on, Johnny, don't play stupid," she said.

"Johnny's been in Vietnam for the last two years saving the world for Democracy—or whatever we're saving it for," Bob said.

"Don't tell me the local bigmouths haven't kept you filled in on our Laura," Sheila said.

"Oh, shut up, Duck," Bob said. He looked at me and grinned. "As a small girl Sheila used to stick pins in insects just to watch them wriggle."

"That's not fair," Sheila said. "I just thought Johnny ought to be prepared for what's bound to come out in the open. We don't want two cases of amnesia, do we?"

They both thought that was a hell of a joke. I was developing a slow burn but there was no chance for it to intensify, because we'd arrived at the terrace and Bob opened the screen door. Inside, the servant was in conference with Lydia Gibney. She was something. She had to be in her middle fifties because Bob was in his early thirties and Emerson a couple of years older. But you wouldn't have believed it if you didn't know the facts.

Her hair was a golden blonde, like Laura's and Bob's. Her shoulders were broad, her hips narrow. Her eyes were large, a darker blue than the children's, and she had a wide generous mouth. I suppose the hair was carefully tinted; I know the mouth was expertly painted. But the figure was a young woman's, and her skin was tanned but not leathery. I thought of a blonde version of the present-day Joan Crawford. Vitality and excitement radiated from her. She had been married to T.J. for at least 35 years and there was no sign that he'd been able to crush her. It was an experience just to look at her.

She turned to face us. A little nerve twitched under a high cheekbone. "You've seen—it?" she asked.

"It's not very pleasant, darling," Bob said. "By the way, you remember Johnny Palmer?"

The dark blue eyes had an almost hypnotic effect on me. A kind of hardness faded from them and they became warm pools. She took a step toward me and held out her hand. Her grip was firm as a man's.

"I've owed you an apology for a long time, Johnny," she said. Her voice was low and husky.

"I can't think what for, Mrs. Gibney," I said.

"There was a time when I should have stood up for you," she said, "but I was too much of a coward. I hope this isn't the day I have to pay for that cowardice."

Cowardice was the last thing in the world you would connect with her. I supposed she meant she should have fought the Old Man over me. I could understand her holding back from that. He could crush you with sheer sound and fury.

There wasn't an opportunity for me to say anything because the Old Man and Emerson came out of the house to join us. T.J. had changed into a tent-sized seersucker suit, with a red ascot tied under his grizzled beard.

Emerson Gibney was as dark as his brother and sister were fair. His sports jacket looked as though it had been made for someone else. His dark eyes peered at me through horn-rimmed glasses, and they were openly hostile.

"Hello, Palmer," he said.

I said hello. I was still standing next to Lydia Gibney. "Is Laura all right?" I asked her.

"She's up in her room," Lydia said. "Marcia—Emerson's wife—is looking after her. Have you met Marcia?"

"No, I don't think so."

I heard Sheila laugh. "There's always something unexpected around the corner, Johnny."

"I think you should all have some coffee and something to eat," Lydia said. "The police will be here presently and heaven knows when we'll have another chance. Won't you help yourself, Johnny?"

The Old Man had crossed to the door and was looking out at the spitting gargoyles. "They're sending Zack along from the County Attorney's office," he said casually.

Bob echoed Sheila's laughter. "Didn't I tell you, Johnny? The Gibneys never take the rap for anything."

Manuel Zack.

Item: He was a former F.B.I. man.

Item: He had been involved in an antitrust case brought by the Government against the Gibneys. At the trial he had failed to give the expected testimony. The Gibneys were acquitted.

Item: The F.B.I. dropped him immediately after the trial. He promptly got a job as special investigator for the Prosecutor's Office in our county. Everybody knew T.J. had used his influence. Manuel Zack was T.J.'s boy.

Item: Everybody said he was as mean as they come.

I had just got down a cup of coffee and half an English muffin with some grape jelly on it when the two green-and-white State Police cars wheeled up the driveway spraying bluestone onto the grass borders. Manuel Zack and a trooper wearing green-tinted glasses got out of the first car. Two more troopers with cameras

and other equipment got out of the second car.

Zack, wearing a tropical worsted in charcoal-gray, came up the path to the terrace. His white shirt was unbuttoned at the neck and a red-and-blue-striped tie was pulled loose and a little to one side. His egg-bald head was sunburned and peeling a little. He had a wide thin mouth like the edge of a carving knife. When his black eyes looked at you, you felt he could read the label on the inside of your shirt collar.

"Come in, Zack," T.J. said, opening the screen door. "Glad you could make yourself available."

"My pleasure," Zack said, looking quickly from face to face. He wound up glaring at me. "House guest?" he asked.

"John Palmer is a neighbor in the village, Mr. Zack," Lydia said.

Zack's eyes narrowed. "Oh, yes," he said. "Local war hero. You spend the night here, Palmer?"

"No."

"Then how do you happen to be here at this time of day?"

"I came to call on Miss Laura Gibney," I said.

"At six o'clock in the morning?"

It was Lydia who stepped into the breach for me. "Johnny and Laura were childhood sweethearts," she said. "They used to go on early-morning fishing trips in the old days. This was the first chance they'd had to meet since Johnny got back from the war. For sentimental reasons, I suppose, they chose to meet as they'd been accustomed to do when they were children."

Zack glanced at T.J. "He's the one you told me about?"

The Old Man nodded.

"So tell me what time you got here and how you came," Zack said to me.

"I walked," I said. "My family lives on Maple Road, which is less than a mile from the borders of Mr. Gibney's property. I came over the fence at the north end and walked through the woods and across the fields to the place where Laura and I used to meet. She wasn't there."

"So?"

"So I came up here to look for her, just outside there between the fountains. I saw Laura sitting on the bank of the pond. And I saw a body floating in the water."

"You didn't see anything happen? You didn't see this Julian Traynor before he was a dead body?"

"No. So far as I know I've never seen Traynor before that."

Zack dropped me for a moment. "You told me on the phone, T.J., that your daughter has some kind of memory block about what happened—what she may have seen."

"That's what she says," T.J. said.

"You have any reason to doubt it?"

T.J. drew a deep breath. "You know Laura's history, Zack. You helped look for her when she ran away from home. I don't know her any more."

I heard a sharp little intake of breath from Lydia. She was standing by the buffet table, a cup of coffee in her hand. The cup rattled slightly in the saucer. Emerson had wandered to the far end of the terrace as though he didn't want to be a part of this. "The Bobbsey Twins" were sitting on a wicker sofa, watching with a kind of bright excitement. I found myself thinking they looked like a couple of bloodthirsty spectators at a bullfight.

"Let's get this 'Traynor character straight,'" Zack said. "He's been living here for how long?"

"Nearly six months," T.J. said. He took a long thin cigar out of the breast pocket of his seersucker jacket and lit it. "He's doing—was doing—a history of the Gibney family. I spent several hours a day with him making tapes—talking into a tape recorder. He was just about ready to begin the actual writing."

"Get along well with everyone?"

T.J. looked around at his family. "Just fine," he said. "Nice fellow, pleasant sense of humor." He smiled a wry smile. "He stood up under my bullying very well. He'd come to seem like one of the family."

"I know he helped with your daughter when she was finally located in New York," Zack said. "Acted as a sort of go-between, didn't he?"

"She refused to see any of the family," T.J. said, his voice harsh. "There was nothing we could do about it—legally, that is. She's over twenty-one. Julian volunteered to talk to her—on Mrs. Gibney's behalf."

Lydia put down her unsteady coffee cup. "We had all made mistakes with Laura, knowingly and unknowingly," she said. Her wide eyes shifted to T.J. and quickly away again. "I wanted her to know that we still loved her, that nothing else mattered, that there'd be no recriminations, no demands. Julian went to New York to see her—four or five times before she agreed to let me

talk with her. Julian had done a wonderful job, because when Laura and I met there were no barriers, no angers."

"But she wouldn't see T.J.?"

"No. But I kept at her, hoping somehow that the wounds could be healed. I finally persuaded her to come here yesterday for my husband's birthday party. Julian drove in to New York and brought her out here."

"You think Traynor had romanced your daughter?" Zack asked.

"I don't know what you mean," Lydia said.

"We can't play this with gloves on, Mrs. Gibney," Zack said. "Your daughter has been carrying on with everybody in New York. We know that. Do you think Traynor's scalp was added to her list of trophies?"

There was a kind of giggling laugh from Sheila.

"I think I very much resent your way of putting things, Mr. Zack," Lydia said.

"Lydia, we've got to face the facts," T.J. said.

"Yes, facts, Mrs. Gibney," Zack said. "We have to believe that someone murdered Traynor in a rage, running him through with those shears. Of course we may get lucky. There may be some good clear prints on the handles of the shears, and that will be that. But I seldom get that lucky. So we have to consider who could have developed a murderous hatred for this nice young man who had come to seem 'like one of the family.' We don't know, at the moment, what your daughter's relationship with him was. And we don't know about Palmer here."

"I told you I'd never laid eyes on him," I said.

"Until this morning," Zack said.

"Until this morning when I saw him dead in the pond."

"So you say," Zack took a handkerchief out of his pocket and blotted his bald head. It was oppressively hot. "Just what was your current relationship with Laura Gibney? I know what happened seven years ago. You were lucky that T.J. didn't have your hide then. What about now?"

I could feel an angry pulse beating in my temples. "Since that time you're talking about I had never seen or had any contact with Laura until three days ago. I went to see her at the place in New York where she sings. She told me she was coming here yesterday for her father's birthday party. It was left that we'd try to meet sometime today."

"Did you live with her three days ago in New York?"

"No, you cheap jerk, I didn't," I said.

The knife-edge mouth widened in a satisfied little smile. I realized he wanted me to blow my top.

"But you planned to resume the old relationship when you met at the old place this morning?"

"I planned to ask her to marry me," I said, fighting for control.

"Oh, Johnny!" Lydia whispered.

"You and Laura Gibney had agreed to meet at the place where it all started?" Zack asked.

"No. We hadn't agreed to any time or place. I just thought she might—might come there."

"At dawn? After an all-night party?"

"Yes."

"But she hadn't actually promised?"

"No."

"Evidently she planned to meet *someone* at dawn," Zack said. "Suppose it could have been Traynor and not you?"

I was still fighting to keep my voice steady. "She told me that she'd started out to meet me—at the old place—where I'd expected her. And then she found herself sitting on the edge of the pond staring at Traynor's dead body."

"And you bought that?" He looked around at the others. "You all bought it?"

No one spoke. Zack came back to me.

"This girl you say you want to marry," he said. "If you saw her run a man through with a pair of garden shears, would you admit you saw it?"

I just stared at him.

"And if you caught her with Traynor and you killed him—you've been trained to kill on the spot, haven't you?—would your girl friend tell on you, do you think?"

When I didn't answer he turned away from me with a little gesture of disgust and addressed himself to T.J. "In my experience," he said, "ninety-nine percent of all these sudden amnesia cases are fakes. I think I'd better talk to your daughter, T.J."

"Will you get Laura down here?" T.J. said to his wife.

I was wet all over with sweat. It was hot, but anger was mainly responsible for it. I saw what was happening, what Zack's and T.J.'s plan was. Laura, the black sheep of the family, and I were to be thrown to the wolves, one way or another.

I looked at the Old Man and I don't think I ever hated anyone so much in my life, not even that sniper behind a rock in a swamp in Vietnam. This was a man who never forgave. Laura had shamed him by her escape into Hippieland. She had further shamed him by her refusal to come meekly home and submit once more to his authority after she'd been found. She had shamed him long ago with me. Now she was to be thrown to the wolves—to Zack specifically. I was to be used any way that was convenient to implement that punishment. If I was destroyed in the Gibney stonecrusher, that would be only proper punishment for my adolescent crime.

Lydia had gone to find Laura. Zack had helped himself to a cup of coffee and a slice of cold ham made into a sandwich on homemade bread. He was a noisy chewer.

I went over to T.J. who had finished some kind of whispered consultation with the owlish Emerson and was now staring out across the lawn at the gargoyles.

"You're not going to let Zack put Laura through that kind of dirty-minded grilling in front of everyone, are you?" I asked him.

His strong white teeth showed in a bearded smile. "I'm going to let Zack handle this case in his own way," he said. "He's a top-flight investigator."

"I've had some experience with the kind of mental block that Laura has suffered," I said. "I've watched psychiatrists in the service handle dozens of cases. Zack's kind of pressure could prolong the block indefinitely. It might even do Laura permanent damage."

"When Zack needs your psychiatric skill I'll tell him to talk to you," T.J. said.

"I won't stand for it," I said.

His shaggy eyebrows rose. "You won't stand for it? You really are a presumptuous young twerp, Palmer."

Whatever I might have said—and I have to admit I was groping for words—was stalled by the arrival on the terrace of Laura, followed by Lydia and a woman I supposed to be Emerson's wife, Marcia. She was a tall bony young woman, with her hair drawn back in a severe knot at the nape of her neck, and she wore no makeup. She was like a Sunday School teacher I'd once had whom I remembered without pleasure.

Zack put down the remnant of his ham sandwich and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. I saw Sheila huddle closer to

Bob on the wicker couch, her green eyes glittering. This was to be the main event for the *voyeurs*, I thought.

Laura had changed out of the polkadot shift. She was wearing a black cotton turtlenecked sweater, the sleeves rolled up above her elbows. There was a red miniskirt and matching red sandals. She looked at me as if I was the only person present she'd ever seen before. I felt my heart thump against my ribs.

"This is Mr. Zack," Lydia said to Laura. "He's in charge and he has to ask you some questions, darling."

"Sit down, Miss Gibney," Zack said, in a surprisingly gentle voice. "Have some coffee?"

"No, thank you," Laura said.

She sat down in one of the porch chairs facing Zack, her arms wrapped around her as though she were suffering some sort of internal pain.

"Your family tells me that you've drawn some sort of memory blank," Zack said.

"Yes." It was scarcely audible.

"Suppose you tell me what you do remember," Zack said. He watched her as he lit a cigarette.

"I got up shortly before five o'clock," Laura said slowly. "I was going to meet Johnny Palmer at the trout stream." She glanced at me.

"But Palmer says you had no specific date, no agreed-upon time or place to meet."

"That's true. But I was sure Johnny would be there."

"And he says he was sure you would be there," Zack said. "You two have some sort of special ESP with each other?"

"Perhaps."

"So you planned to go to the trout stream?"

"Yes."

"What changed your mind?"

She looked straight at him. "I don't know."

"Oh, come now, Miss Gibney, shouldn't we stop playing games?" Zack said.

"I came onto the lawn out there near the fountains," Laura said. "The next thing I remember is sitting on the edge of the pool, and Julian was—was dead in the water."

"My, my," Zack said, "how convenient not to remember what happened in between."

"It's torture not to remember," Laura said sharply.

"Maybe I can help you relieve that torture," Zack said. "Palmer had asked you to marry him, right? And you had things to straighten out before you could say yes, right?"

"I hadn't asked her to marry me," I said. "I told you I planned to ask her. I never got the chance—not till afterwards. I said then I hoped she was going to marry me. She couldn't have known about it beforehand."

"With all that ESP going for the both of you?" Zack's laugh was short. "Did you know Palmer was going to ask you to marry him, Miss Gibney?"

Laura's china-blue eyes rested on me for a moment. "Yes, I knew he was going to ask me."

"And you had to straighten things out with Traynor before you could say yes?"

"I didn't have to straighten anything out with anyone," Laura said. "I was going to say no."

"You had to say no because you were already committed to Julian Traynor?"

"I was committed to no one," Laura said. She didn't look at me again.

"But you had an affair going with Traynor, didn't you, while he was being the diplomatic representative of your family?"

She took a frighteningly long time to answer, I thought. "I didn't have an affair with him," she said. Somehow it sounded evasive.

"I suggest you did," Zack said. "I think I could prove it if I have to. I suggest you planned to meet Traynor before you joined your friend Johnny at the trout stream. I suggest you and Traynor had an argument. I suggest you agreed to let Traynor have one more fling, or he tried to force himself on you. I suggest that Palmer, who'd gotten impatient, came up to the house to look for you and found you and Traynor together. I suggest he blew his stack, picked up the garden shears, and rammed them through Traynor. I suggest all that is what you so conveniently can't remember, Miss Gibney. I suggest it's best for you not to remember because there aren't many men who would want to marry you after Hippieville and Traynor and God-knows-who-else."

I was standing close enough to him to grab him by the shoulder and spin him around. I wasn't thinking about killing him. I just wanted to punish him. I hit him on the jaw with everything I had in my left and was ready to bring over the crusher with my right

when I was swarmed on from behind by T.J. and Bob and Emerson.

Zack's face was a blur as he came toward me, smiling. While the others held me armlocked, Zack slapped me dizzy, back and forth with his open hand. Then he stepped back.

"Let him go," he said. His eyes were angry black gimlets. "They trained us in the F.B.I. how to hand-to-hand fight a killer. I think I know tricks they never taught you in the service, Palmer."

If T.J. and Bob, who were still holding my arms, had let go I'd have leaped at him. I wanted to wipe that smile off his mean face. It was Laura who changed things. She had come quickly to me, her cool fingers touching my cheek, which must have been red from the slapping.

"Please, Johnny, please!" she said. "I can stand it if you can. What he says doesn't really matter."

The screen door slammed behind us. The trooper with the green-tinted glasses had come up from the pool. He took in the scene and his right hand rested lightly on his holstered revolver.

"You okay, Mr. Zack?" he asked.

"I'm just fine," Zack said.

"I think you better have a look at things down there before we move him," the trooper said.

It turned out that I knew this fellow with the sergeant's stripes on his shirt sleeve and the green glasses. He was a local. His name was Mike Sayers. He'd been two years ahead of me in school, college, and Vietnam. We'd never been chums, but we always said hello and exchanged small talk. He looked at me as though he'd never seen me before, with that deadpan expression the state troopers develop when they say, "Can I see your driver's license?"

Zack gave me a crooked smile. "So it's recess time, Palmer. But school's not out. Nobody's to leave the premises, and that goes double for you, war hero."

Zack and Sayers went out through the screen door and disappeared down the grass bank toward the pool. The atmosphere on the terrace was highly charged, and yet no one said anything for a moment. Emerson had joined his Marcia and they were whispering together in a far corner. Laura had turned away from me and was watching the disappearing law. "The Bobbsey Twins" still sat together on the couch, bright-eyed, watching eagerly. Lydia made

a quick exit into the house, almost running.

The Old Man came over to the buffet table, cut himself a thick slice of ham, and popped an English muffin into the hotel-sized toaster. While he waited he turned toward Laura.

"Would you like to tell us what happened, Laura?" he asked in a flat voice.

She didn't speak or move.

"I've been in touch with my lawyer," T.J. said. "Maxwell's already on his way up from New York. I'll see to it you have the very best advice and help."

Laura whirled around. "So that the Gibney name won't be damaged, Father?"

"There isn't much more you can do to damage it," he said. "But we all have to stand together at a time like this."

"And the best way to stand together is to pin it on me or on Johnny or on both of us?"

"It would simplify matters if you'd stop pretending you don't know what happened," T.J. said.

"Has anybody ever had the courage to tell you, Father, that you're a miserable excuse for a man?" Laura said, her voice shaking.

The toaster made a popping noise. From the wicker couch came the sound of mocking applause, provided by Bob and Sheila.

"I think I'd like a little fresh air," Laura said. "Will you come with me, Johnny?"

She went out the screen door without waiting for me to answer. I followed her. She walked around the corner of the house in the opposite direction from the pool, past the sloping cellar doors.

There was a small flower garden surrounded by a two-foot stone wall that I remembered was Lydia's particular pleasure. I'd seen her in the early mornings when I was a kid. She'd be wearing a bright-colored smock, weeding and cutting. There were columbines with hummingbirds, tame as pets, already fluttering around the blossoms.

Laura sat down on the wall and behind her was a blaze of oriental poppies. She looked up at me, and her face was pale and her blue eyes were dark with pain.

"You're entitled to some sort of explanation," she said.

"There's nothing to explain," I said, "unless you want to." I sat down on the wall, facing her, and lit a cigarette. "I was an idiot to suppose you would even think of marrying me after all these

years. It just happens that nothing has changed for me, but my life has been different from yours—fenced in by the disciplines of schools and war. There's been nothing new to change the way I've always felt about you."

"Dear Johnny, that was a very nice speech," she said. She reached out and touched my hand, then looked away across the scarlet bed of poppies. "I didn't change for a long time, Johnny. I loved you as totally as any young girl ever loves. I kept waiting for you to come back and—and carry me away. But you never did."

"I was a stupid kid. I was afraid."

"And rightly," she said. "You've had a taste of how they operate this morning. I was a coward, too, Johnny. I knew they were intercepting letters and phone calls from you. I never had the courage to try to get in touch with you myself. I was literally a prisoner for so very long, Johnny. I knew what really mattered to T.J. All he cared about was the family reputation. Not even that, really—he cared only about his own reputation. He kept insisting that the only reason he wasn't prosecuting you was to save *my* reputation, *my* future..."

"I expected all the things I'd been brought up to expect—that you would be my husband, the father of my children, my whole life. This was every woman's dream, I'd been told, and I dreamed it. But month after month, year after year passed, and nothing happened. So I began to think it was all a phony."

She hesitated, then went on, "I watched my mother. Her dream had come true, I thought. She had her man—a big powerful man. She had her children, her home, her luxurious life. I watched her and I saw that it was all a phony. She was driven by anxieties and tensions I didn't understand, but I knew they were there. Everyone always said what a wonderful horsewoman she was, how daring, how expert. I began to realize that she was taking chances in the hope that some day she'd break her neck! The way she drove a sports car—and then the way she'd shut herself up for days on end and try to drink herself to death."

"Your mother?" I could hardly believe it.

"My mother," Laura said. "I began to realize that the greatest villain in the world was T.J. He had destroyed all of Lydia's romantic notions about living, he'd smothered Emerson and Bob, paying them off with gobs of money. We were all his puppets and we would do what he said whenever he chose to pull the strings."

"My God," I said.

"But even my father couldn't shut me away from the world like some Bronte heroine," Laura said. "There were newspapers and magazines and television and books. I was locked away from you and from life as I thought it was going to be, but I began to understand that out there a revolution was going on, Johnny—the revolution of the young people of my generation against the Establishment. It sounded like just words at first—fancy talk to justify throwing off discipline, to excuse self-indulgence in unheard-of freedoms. Then I began to believe in it. You were lost, Johnny—you and all the young men like you who were fighting a war that didn't mean anything—to me, an immoral war. You'd been sold a bill of goods, and there was a good chance you wouldn't live to find it out."

"I listened to T.J. raging about these perverted young people with their long hair and their beads and their crazy talk about Love and Peace—and then I heard a famous woman quoted as saying that all the crazy clothes and the long hair and the beards were simply a way of crying out, 'Look at us, listen to us—before it's too late!'"

She glanced at me. "You don't believe a word of that, do you, Johnny? You fought your war for T.J.'s kind of world and you were lucky enough to come out of it whole; and now you're one of T.J.'s boys."

"I don't know," I said. "I would hate to think I am."

She drew a deep breath. "Well, Johnny, I joined the revolution. You know something? I was already old. I was past twenty-one." She laughed. "The kids I joined thought I was pretty long in the tooth, but I believed in them with all my heart. Not the rabble rousers and the building burners, but the kids who believed in Love and in Peace."

I saw that her hands were locked together in front of her, so tightly that her knuckles were bone-white.

"You don't have to tell me about it," I said. The truth was I didn't want to hear it.

"One of the things they believed was that living together was as natural a part of life as breathing or eating. It didn't have to be wrapped around with T.J.'s concepts of honor and decency and propriety. It was just a thing that people did and felt better for having done—with promises or pledges or long-range selectivity."

"So you lived that way," I said in a tight voice.

"Freely," she said, but without looking at me. "With almost anyone." She looked at me with a kind of pity in her eyes. "So you see, Johnny, why I had to say no if you asked me to marry you. You could never understand. You would try, but you would think of me just as T.J. thinks of me."

"No!"

"Poor Johnny. You know what's so terrible about it? When I saw you the other night in New York I had the crazy notion that I could wipe the slate clean and we could take up where we'd left off. I wanted to, Johnny. And then I realized I'd be walking right back into T.J.'s world. Worse than that, I'd already been tempted. I'd agreed to come back here for T.J.'s seventieth birthday before I knew you were back in the land of the living. I told myself that I'd come because Lydia wanted it so much. She hadn't been able to break away and I think I mean a great deal to her. I told myself I was being noble, but the truth is, Johnny, I was tempted."

"By Julian Traynor?"

She looked at me with that same pity in her eyes. "Poor Johnny, you see how it would always be? Every man who ever looked at me would be a suspect."

"Was Traynor one of them?" I asked. "Can Zack prove it?"

"Do you know something, Johnny? Zack, with T.J. behind him, can prove anything. T.J., with an army of Zacks working for him, is our world today. They run our economics, our politics, our wars, our ghettos, our starvation areas. You cry out about injustice and the Zacks of the world, supported by the T.J.'s of the world, will prove beyond a doubt that you're actually protesting against Justice."

"What about Traynor?" I asked, with a dogged stupidity.

"The T.J.'s of the world, with their Zacks, write our history. Their counterparts write all the other histories. They obliterate truth whenever it serves their interests." She gave a small mirthless laugh. "So much for my stump speech. No, Johnny, not Traynor, although he very much wanted it. You see, from where he sat I was a round heel, and therefore available. T.J. sits in that same seat, and God help me so do you, Johnny. I'm sorry if I've hurt you, but you had to know why there's no future for us. I've lived in another world with another set of values, and there's no way to make it match yours."

There was no time to protest, even if I'd known how to protest

or been sure that I wanted to protest. Mike Sayers came around the corner of the house, his green-tinted glasses glittering in the sunlight.

"Back inside, please," he said.

I stood up, and every bone in my body seemed to ache. Laura stood very close to me. "Don't try to fight for me, Johnny," she said softly. "It's a battle you can't win—not against the likes of Zack and T.J." She kissed me on the cheek and I felt as if I'd been burned.

"You truly don't remember what happened this morning?" I asked.

"Before God, I don't," she whispered.

"Then I'll fight," I said.

I took her cool hand in mine and led her toward the terrace. We hadn't quite reached the corner of the house when I heard the sound of a heavy vehicle coming up the driveway. I turned and saw the red truck that belonged to the local sanitation department. They'd come to collect the trash and garbage. Then I remembered the dark smoke I'd seen coming from one of the chimneys.

What had someone been burning on such a hot day?

I don't know that I can describe exactly how I felt. There was a pain in my gut like a hot ball. I hadn't gone ten yards toward the terrace before I was blaming myself for everything that had happened to Laura. At the age of 16 I should have come charging back on a white horse and carried her away. I knew I couldn't have done it, but I should have tried.

She had painted a vivid picture for me. I'd have been faced by T.J. and an army of servants and gardeners and chauffeurs, all looking like Manuel Zack, and they'd have beaten my brains out. But at least I'd have tried, and then maybe she wouldn't have run away and—and done everything she had done.

Laura was right. I was one of TJ's boys and I played by his rules. I had surrendered Laura to the Vandals. I could forgive her anything because, damn it, I still loved her.

And just as I was feeling very noble about that decision I remembered my brother Eddie's letter: "They finally found her in the East Village living in a pad with half a dozen long-haired goons." I began to have visions of what that had been like, and I felt sick and ice-cold in spite of the August heat.

You could recall things about yourself and write them off without any feeling of loathing or horror. There had been a gaudy place in Saigon where I'd spent the better part of two leaves. That was an exigency of war, I told myself, to be forgiven and forgotten. But Laura? A small voice told me that was an exigency of war, too—a war against the T.J.'s and the Zacks, a war against what she thought of as the Establishment, a war against indecent use of power...

Someone had produced an ice cooler while we were gone, and Zack was making himself an iced coffee, laced with thick fresh cream. He gave us a knowing little smile as we rejoined the family, positioned almost as they had been when we left.

"Got your story all nicely arranged between you?" Zack asked.

Sergeant Sayers was a spectator at the far end of the terrace.

I felt myself figuratively tightening my belt. I was going to fight this battle right down to the last man, even if that last man was me. I looked around at the rest of T.J.'s army. One son and his wife stood in the corner, dark and gloomy; the other son and his wife sat on the wicker couch, waiting avidly for Round Two. Lydia had come back from inside the house and was sitting in an armchair at the head of the buffet table, still the perfect hostess. There was one change. She had put on a pair of black-lensed glasses that completely hid anything she might be thinking. She was now a kind of glamorous sphinx. T.J. stood across from her, watching her as though he expected she might go to pieces.

"Some facts for all of you," Zack said, "just so you'll know where we stand. There are no fingerprints on the murder weapon. Sayers found a pair of cotton gardening gloves thrown away in the lilac bush just beyond the pond. We assume the murderer wore them." He sipped his creamy drink, the ice tinkling against the side of the glass. "The garden tools are kept in a shed about fifty yards from the pond. Swenson, the head gardener, runs a neat ship. Tools are not left lying around. There is an exact place on the wall of the shed where those garden shears usually hang. On a table a few feet away there is a workbasket full of gardening gloves—like the pair we found in the lilacs. It paints a kind of different picture from the one I first had." He put his glass down and lit a cigarette.

"I thought of a quarrel, an explosion, and someone grabbing up the shears which just happened to be there and striking with them. There might be an excuse for that—intolerable provocation,

self-defense. Even"—and he looked at Laura—"temporary insanity. Now we have to picture it another way. Traynor goes down to the pool sometime before five in the morning, perhaps to swim, probably to meet someone. You, Miss Gibney?"

Laura shook her head.

"Then someone else," Zack said. His dark eyes moved almost hungrily to Sheila, then to Lydia, then to the stone-faced Marcia. "Traynor meets this someone at the pool and they engage in some sort of dalliance. Miss Gibney comes out and sees it. She's infuriated because Traynor is her property."

"That's pure fiction," I said.

"I know," Zack said, grinning at me. "We're inventing a story. So—Miss Gibney sees this thing taking place and she blows her stack. She conveniently doesn't remember it now, but she moves swiftly down the top side of the garden to the tool shed, puts on a pair of gloves, and takes the shears from its place on the wall. Then she comes stealthily back along the low side of the garden to the pool. Traynor's companion has by now retired to the house, and Miss Gibney—temporarily insane, we may say out of kindness—runs the shears through her false lover. She tosses away the gloves, but she has no time to escape because Palmer has appeared on the wall between the gargoyle fountains and is looking down at her. She can't invent a story to satisfy him on the spur of the moment, so she invents amnesia."

"I'm not sure you have the legal right to indulge in this kind of fantasizing," I said.

"I sure do, boy," Zack said. "Under the law it's called inference from the facts. I have the right to infer anything I please from the facts. The weak spot in my inference is the sudden disappearance of the third party. It would be more watertight if we assume that the dalliance at the pool was between Traynor and Miss Gibney, and that you, Palmer, were the enraged witness. You knew very well where the tool shed was from your boyhood days around here. You armed yourself with the shears and you killed Traynor. Miss Gibney could have been shocked out of remembering by the violence of it, and because it was you, Palmer. Or because it was you she's decided to protect you at any cost."

"You keep going round and round in the same circle," I said. "Do I get a turn at inventing a story?"

"You must have sweated out a dozen of 'em in the last few hours," Zack said. "If you've got a good one, why not try it on us?"

I reached out and touched Laura's hand—for luck. And then I turned toward Mike Sayers who was studying me with a blank expression through his green glasses.

"I want to be sure Sergeant Sayers is listening," I said. "I've known him since we were kids. We've been through just about the same mill. I only hope he hasn't sold out."

"Meaning?" Zack asked, his eyebrows contracting.

"Meaning that everybody knows you sold out long ago, Zack. T.J. took you to the mountaintop and showed you the world, and you lied for him and he paid you off with a job—and probably with a substantial bank account."

"Do we have to listen to a rehash of this dreary small-town gossip?" T.J. asked in a tired but dangerous voice.

"Let him go on," Zack said. The glitter in his black eyes told me that if we ever met alone it was going to be him or me.

"I just want to be sure that someone listens who hasn't been brainwashed by T. J. Gibney's world," I said. "Are you listening, Mike?"

A little nerve twitched high up on Sayers' bronzed cheek, but he didn't speak or make any sign. There was no way to tell about him.

"There are a number of reasons for killing a man," I said. "You kill because somebody orders you to; I've done that too many times. You kill out of jealousy; that's the one Zack's bugged with. You kill for greed; no one here needs anything that a dead Julian Traynor could give. Finally, you kill because the person threatens you, places you in danger, might even destroy you. So I draw my inference, Zack. I infer that there was no reason for anyone to kill Julian Traynor except that he was a threat. So—who could he threaten and how?"

I turned to look straight at T.J. "For months Traynor has been digging into the history of the Gibney family and particularly into the personal life of T. J. Gibney. I infer that somehow, somewhere—under some stone or from behind the woodwork—Traynor came up with something that T. J. Gibney and the Gibney family couldn't afford to have made public. After months of discovering how the world is really run, I infer that Julian Traynor put the heat on T. J. Gibney or on some other member of the family. Pay up or face the music. I infer that Traynor had a strong hand and that the Gibneys knew they were hooked for life. The one flaw in Traynor's scheme was that he underestimated just

how far the Gibney family would go to prevent being hooked. They would go the limit, the whole way."

"Now ain't that something," Zack said sarcastically.

"I infer further that Traynor had evidence, that the evidence is somewhere in his notes, in the tapes he made, or even locked away in a safety-deposit box somewhere. I infer that if you go through Traynor's possessions you will find what you need to wrap up this case, Zack. Unless—"

"Unless what, buster?" Zack said, and his tone was menacing.

"Unless it's too late," I said.

"It's just a matter of routine to go through Traynor's belongings," Mike Sayers said. Everybody turned to look at him. I think they'd all forgotten he was there. "To back up your theory, Mr. Zack, there could be letters from Miss Gibney to Traynor."

"There's just one more thing I'd like to make clear," I said. "You've chosen Laura and me as your pigeons. Neither one of us is going to answer any more questions without the advice of a lawyer."

"Well, I don't know about you, Palmer," T.J. said, "but Guy Maxwell should be here soon. He will, of course, represent Laura."

"You have to be kidding," I said. "You don't think I'd let Laura be represented by your lawyer, do you?"

T.J. seemed to swell up and I thought he was going to burst. "You won't let!"

"Laura isn't a Gibney any more," I said. "She's joined the opposition."

"Oh, my God," Lydia said softly. "Oh, my God."

For better or for worse I'd accomplished one thing. Zack and Sayers went upstairs to go through Traynor's bedroom and study. I'd been guessing, but if I'd guessed right I might have blown the ball game then and there. If there was anything damaging to T. J. Gibney upstairs it was a sure thing Zack would try to cover for him. If Mike Sayers had sold out too, then Traynor's secret—if he'd uncovered one—would stay a secret.

The moment the law headed upstairs, T.J. gave a little signal to his sons and the three of them disappeared into the house, leaving me on the terrace with the four women.

It was Marcia Gibney who broke the strained silence. "Coffee, Mr. Palmer?" she asked. She'd crossed to the buffet to pour herself a cup.

I didn't want coffee or anything else. I wanted out. I wanted a chance to think. I kept looking at Laura and that brought on visions I wanted to destroy.

"I don't suppose you and Laura can ever forgive T.J. for what happened long ago," Marcia said. She produced a bottle of saccharine from the pocket of her dress to sweeten her coffee. "But he is a fine man, a fair man, a decent man. His only problem is his temper. Don't try him beyond his capacity to control it, Mr. Palmer. Do you really think we won't do everything we can to protect Laura?"

"Protect her from what?" I asked.

"Why—why, the consequences of what she's done!" Marcia said. "Surely no one can believe that she was in possession of her faculties when she—when she did what she did."

"Please, Johnny, there's no point," Laura said before I could answer. "Don't you see, I'm being offered a Gibney kindness. I'm to be shipped to a mental institution instead of the deathhouse."

"Laura!" Lydia protested. She leaned her head back against her chair. I suspected the blue eyes were closed behind the black lenses. "For the love of God, tell me the truth, Laura."

"The truth about what, Mother?"

Lydia suddenly leaned forward, gripping the arms of her chair. "*What did you see this morning?*"

Laura shook her head from side to side. "I've told the truth, Mother. I don't know. I keep struggling to remember—but I don't know! It won't come back."

Sheila got into the act then with her high harsh voice. "Is there any way you can take her away from here, Johnny, so she can think without being badgered?"

"How?"

"My car's by the front door—the red Mercedes." She held out a set of keys to me. "Take it and get the hell out of here as fast as you can. You see what's going to happen, don't you? Zack will build up a case against one or both of you and then when Laura *does* remember it will be too late. They'll simply say she's inventing something to clear herself—or you, Johnny."

"I doubt we'd get fifty yards away from the house," I said. "There are other troopers. And running would make things look worse for us."

"Then don't let Laura out of your sight," Sheila said. Her usually laughing face was now a hard mask. "Somebody knows what

Laura will remember, when and if she does."

Marcia stared at her sister-in-law. "Sheila! Are you trying to say that someone in the family might harm Laura to—to *keep* her from remembering?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying, my dear innocent dope! And God forbid it should be my man. Get away from here, Laura. Take the temptation away from them."

There was an anguished cry from Lydia as she covered her face with her hands.

"Tell her not to talk that way, Mother Gibney," Marcia said.

"Lydia knows how they are," Sheila said.

"Not murder," Lydia whispered. "Oh, please, not *murder!*"

"You think it was a passing tramp who killed Julian?" Sheila said. "Do you really believe it was Laura or Johnny?" She turned to us and the green cat's-eyes were brilliant. "If it was Bob, I warn you I'll lie you both into the electric chair if I have to." She tossed the car keys on the buffet and headed for the house. "I need a large slug of bourbon."

The trickle of sweat that ran down my back was cold. Someone must be choked with fear that Laura would remember the truth. Traynor's death had been planned, but one thing had gone wrong. Laura, who should have been asleep, had been an eyewitness to the murder.

"It's not as monstrous as Sheila paints it, or as you think it is, Laura," Lydia said. She sounded exhausted.

"You've defended Father all the years of your marriage," Laura said. "Don't try to whitewash him to me, Mother, I know him."

"I don't think you do. I don't think you could," Lydia said. "You haven't ever loved him."

Laura's wide blue eyes contracted. "Have you forgotten, Mother? Have you forgotten what every little girl feels about her father? Oh, I loved him—until he stamped it out, like someone putting out a fire."

"Was there ever anything you wanted that he didn't give you?" Lydia asked, a note of pleading in her throaty voice.

"Yes." The blue eyes flicked my way. "Understanding about Johnny Palmer."

"Truly, Laura, can you imagine any father who wouldn't have been outraged?"

"There's no use discussing it, Mother. You've been here this morning. You've watched the way he and Zack work together. It's

clear, isn't it, that he's chosen me, or my friend Johnny, to pay for whatever's happened here. For God's sake, Mother, don't you understand what's going on? A man has been murdered, brutally, cold-bloodedly. What does Father do? Does he ask who is guilty? No, he just wonders how it will come out best for him. Ideally it should be Johnny, an outsider, who did it. But if that won't stick, then it will be me, the daughter who has already publicly shamed him, who is clearly some kind of a rotten nut."

"You say you can't remember what happened!" Lydia's voice rose. "Perhaps Johnny—perhaps you—"

"Listen, Mother, I'll say it once for you, and also in a way for Johnny," Laura said. "I had no reason in the world to want Julian Traynor dead. There is nothing he could have done to me that would have made me want him dead. He came to see me in New York after Father's detectives found me. He was kind and sympathetic and he had the saving grace of being able to find some humor in the situation. A twenty-two-year-old girl fighting the Gibney powerhouse, not without success, amused him.

"But he pleaded your case well, Mother. He made me see that you weren't responsible for the things against which I'd rebelled. He convinced me that it would be a loving gesture to you if I came back here for Father's seventieth birthday. Would I want Julian dead for that? I love you, Mother. I was glad to come to the birthday party if it would make you happy."

"Laura!"

"Julian's attitude was modern—not like yours or Father's or even Johnny's. When he came to see me—three times I think it was—he realized I was living in a different world with different values. He took me somewhere and bought me a drink, then suggested, quite casually, that it would be fun if we went somewhere and made love. I said no, not because he was unattractive, but because of his close association with Father I would be secretly doing it to hurt Father, and that would have been for the wrong reason. He understood. He said, 'Thanks anyway,' and 'See you around'—and that was that. I liked him for understanding. I had no reason on earth for wanting him hurt, let alone brutally murdered."

"If what you've forgotten is that he tried to force himself on you—?"

"Mother, I'm a big girl! Just maybe you can begin to understand that. Father doesn't want to. He decided long ago that I was

a—I guess his words would be 'wanton' and 'jezebel.' It suits his dilemma this morning."

Marcia broke in, her gaunt face set in lines of tension. "Do you believe there's anything to Mr. Palmer's theory that Julian was trying to blackmail T.J.?"

"Or Emerson or Bob or the family image in general. What other reason on earth can there be? My God, Marcia, haven't we lived with that all our lives? Isn't there an entire office in New York staffed with people who do nothing but see to it that the Gibney name has a perpetually glowing halo over it? If Julian found out something that would ruin that image overnight and decided to use it to benefit himself, can you imagine the Gibneys hesitating one minute to stop him?"

"Emerson would never be involved in such a thing," Marcia said.

"My dear sister-in-law," Laura said bitterly, "Emerson is the most cold-blooded of the lot, because he's the weakest. Some day he will be king of the Gibney empire, and he can't risk having anything spoil that dream. He's put up with too much, been a glorified errand boy for too long."

I found myself looking at the keys that Sheila had left on the buffet. I moved casually toward the far end of the terrace to where I could see a part of the circular driveway in front of the house. I could see the red Mercedes and I knew it offered no escape for us. A trooper was leaning against it, talking to a second trooper and to Dr. Fred Marshall, the town health officer. It would have been necessary for him to view the body before it was removed. The doctor was a pleasant youngish man whom I'd known ever since I could remember. Somehow it was a relief to see him there. He was his own man and I knew nobody could buy him. I stepped outside the screen door where he could see me and signaled to him.

He came up the path, his black bag tucked under one arm, wiping the sweat band of his Panama hat with a handkerchief.

"Pretty rugged situation, Johnny," he said. "I'm not the Gibney family doctor, but I was going to offer my services. I understand that Laura is in some kind of shock." As he spoke he could see her with Lydia and Marcia, through the screen.

I guess he'd already been brought up to date but I told him how things were with Laura and about my own experiences with that kind of shock case.

"If Zack keeps hammering at her," I said, "it may close the door tight. Meanwhile—"

"She may be in real danger," Marshall said. He looked at the women. "Logically she should go to the hospital, be carefully sedated, and given a chance to come out of it with her nerve ends less raw."

"So take her to the hospital. She could be protected there." Even as I said it I thought, bitterly, the name of the hospital was The Horace Gibney Memorial Hospital.

"I can't take her out of here against her will, and I can't take her out of here without Zack's approval," Marshall said.

"Not if staying here endangers her health and sanity?"

"We can give it a try," Marshall said.

He led the way back into the screened area. He put his hat and medical bag on a table by the door. He wore his grayish hair crewcut. He reminded me of a colonel I'd had in Vietnam, a tough but compassionate man.

"I'm so sorry for your trouble, Mrs. Gibney," he said to Lydia. He nodded to the others. "Marcia—Laura."

"Hello, Dr. Fred," Laura said.

"I had to come here in my official capacity as the town health officer," Marshall said. "I wondered, Mrs. Gibney, if there is any way I could be helpful to you. Unofficially, I mean."

"It's very nice of you, Doctor," Lydia said.

He smiled at Laura. "I understand you have some problems, young lady."

I saw that her lips were trembling.

"It's a pretty terrifying experience, Dr. Fred," she said, "not remembering something that happened just a little while ago and—and not really wanting to remember!"

"That's why you're not remembering—because you don't want to," he said, as casually as though he were discussing the weather. "You got up, you walked out into the garden, and you saw something so shocking that your mind had to blot it out. Since then you haven't relaxed for an instant. Your nerves must be tight as piano wires. There may be the simplest kind of way out of it. Let me take you to the hospital, place you under sedation that'll let you sleep around the clock and relax all your tensions. When you wake up it's two-to-one you'll remember everything just as clearly as though you'd never forgotten it."

Her eyelids fluttered. "I'm not sure—"

"You'll have to face it sooner or later," he said. His smile was gentle. "It would put an end to all the uncertainty here."

Laura looked at me and her eyes were brimming with tears. I could guess what she was thinking. For all her bitterness, for all her rebellion and anger, she didn't want to be the one to point a finger at anyone, friend or enemy.

"There are no uncertainties here, Doctor, that we aren't quite competent to handle," T.J.'s harsh voice said from the doorway. Emerson and Bob were just behind him. The council of war was over. "Dr. Von Glahn is on his way here. He'll look after Laura."

Von Glahn, I knew, was the Gibneys' doctor. He had recently retired as chief surgeon of The Horace Gibney Memorial Hospital.

"I prefer to have Dr. Fred take care of me," Laura said.

"Whoever takes care of you, Miss Gibney, is going to have to do it here," Zack said. He had come up behind Bob and Emerson. "Unless Dr. Marshall is prepared to state that it's actually dangerous for you to be treated here. And wherever you go, Miss Gibney, one of my men is going to be with you, in the room where you are. That memory of yours could pop back just as quickly as it popped away. I want someone on hand when that happens."

T.J. turned to Zack. "You find anything of interest among Traynor's effects?"

Zack shrugged. "Take days to go through all his notes and tapes." He looked back at Laura. "Just tell me where you'd like to settle in, Miss Gibney, so I can station a man there with you."

"You ought to go to bed," Marshall said. "You ought to take something that will relax you and let you sleep."

"Von Glahn will take care of that, thank you, Doctor," T.J. said.

"I don't want Dr. Von Glahn!" Laura said. "Have you any legal right to keep me here, Mr. Zack?"

"Yes, ma'am," Zack said. "Material witness to a homicide. Here, in the hospital, or in the county jail." He grinned at me. "Same goes for you, Palmer. It would be better here, I should think —more chance that Miss Gibney's memory may stop troubling her—here, where it happened."

My mouth began to feel dry and cottony. They'd worked it out, I thought. Laura would be taken somewhere into the upper regions of the house, put to sleep, guarded by Zack, attended by Von Glahn. How simple for them! "Poor girl, she just never woke up!"

"Well, since I can't be of any help—" Dr. Marshall said. He turned toward his hat and medical bag.

"Wait!" My voice sounded so loud it startled me. "Wait, Dr. Fred!"

He looked back at me. I thought he was a little irritated at the way T.J. had brushed off his offer.

"Dr. Fred, listen to me," I said. I was aware that the entire household was staring at me. I imagined there was something diabolical about the group in the doorway—T.J., Emerson, Bob, and Zack. "There is someone here, perhaps the whole family, who can't afford to have Laura remember what she saw this morning. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Johnny," he said quietly. "But if you're concerned for her safety, Mr. Zack has indicated she'll be under guard at all times. There'll be a trooper with her."

"Can a trooper prevent a medical murder, Dr. Fred?" I shouted at him. "Can a trooper prevent them from fixing it so that she'll never wake up? Dr. Von Glahn is T.J.'s man. Mr. Zack is T.J.'s man. These are all T.J.'s people, and they can't afford to have Laura remember. Don't you understand that?"

"Why, you crazy—" I heard Zack say softly.

For just a moment I thought there was a cloud of doubt in Dr. Marshall's eyes. Then it cleared away. He came over and put a steady hand on my arm.

"You've got yourself worked up into hysteria, Johnny," he said. "Dr. Von Glahn is a highly reputable man. If you think he'd be a party to—oh, no, Johnny. Better take it easy."

He picked up his hat and bag and walked out into the hot sunshine. And Laura and I were now alone with the enemy.

They worked it like a well-tuned motor.

Dr. Von Glahn must have passed Dr. Fred on the driveway as he came in. He was a handsome old gent with silver-white hair and white mustache and goatee. He'd evidently been well briefed on the phone before he'd started out. His attitude toward Laura was deferential and kindly. His suggestion for treatment was perfectly sound: rest under sedation with the hope that, properly relaxed after a period of sleep, the memory block would vanish.

"If you will get this young lady ready for bed, Lydia—" He was an old friend, I imagined, a frequent social guest. His bedside manner was calculated to make you feel complete trust in him. I almost convinced myself that Dr. Fred had been right. Von Glahn was a man of integrity; he couldn't be bought. Laura would be

safe in his care and with a trooper on guard—

Almost.

I looked around at the stonewashed T.J., at Bob who had lost all vestiges of his normal, macabre good humor, at Emerson, pale as ashes. This was not a concerned family—not concerned for Laura's safety. They were only concerned—nearly panicked—by what it was she could remember.

Lydia, moving like an automaton, put her arm around Laura and led her into the house. Laura offered no resistance. She had thrown in the towel, I thought.

Zack gave orders to Sayers in my presence. One of the troopers in the yard, a man named Getliffe, was to be placed on guard, either in or just outside Laura's room.

Marcia tagged along to help with Laura, and T.J. and his two sons and Zack retired once more to the Old Man's study. I was left alone with Mike Sayers.

"You think I'm off my rocker, don't you, Mike?"

The green-tinted glasses swiveled past me toward the study door at the far end of the great entrance hall.

"I agree with you that the Old Man is just what you think he is," he said, "but I think you're way off your rocker when you suggest that he—and the rest of the family—would harm a daughter just to keep her from remembering. And I know you're way off your rocker when you suggest that Von Glahn might be a party to it. As for Zack, he's mean, tough, sadistic—but he's a first-class investigator. Maybe he's accepted a favor here and there, but I don't think he can be bought."

"You trust this trooper Getliffe?"

"All the way," Sayers said. He took off his green glasses, blew on them, and began to wipe them with a clean handkerchief. For the first time I got a look at his level gray eyes. "You and I have seen what the top brass is like in the Service," he said. "Single-track minds. That's how they get to be generals. And that's how you get to be rich, I guess. Ruthless and headed only in one direction. But murder your own flesh and blood?" He put his glasses back on. "I've got to get a report written up."

"No one ever understands how far they'll go," I said. He wasn't listening. "One thing. When you first got here this morning did you notice smoke coming out of one of the chimneys?"

"No, I didn't notice. Probably burning trash."

"At five in the morning?"

"Big birthday party last night. The cleanup lasted till after daylight, according to the help."

I didn't mention the sanitation truck to him. You may ask why not. I didn't go to Simmons, who had been the Gibneys' butler for years and who was in charge of the domestic corps, and ask him what they had been burning in the cellar incinerator at dawn. You may ask why not. So maybe I was off my rocker, but I had a feeling there would be carefully prepared answers to everything.

I was convinced that Julian Traynor had died because he had something on somebody in this big stone fortress. If there had been notes or tapes covering that "something," there was a good chance that's what had been hurriedly burned at dawn. There was a good chance too that there might be remnants of whatever it had been still in the incinerator. If I suggested that to anyone I would be guaranteeing that someone would make certain those remnants would never be found.

When we were kids we used to call the cellar under the big stone house The Catacombs. There were endless corridors and rooms, old coal bins transformed into storage areas, a carpenter shop which was a hobby of Emerson's, enormous brass boilers, furnaces, a garden room where Lydia grew seedlings under fluorescent lights, a paneled game room where there was still, I imagined, a ping-pong table and a billiard table, laundry rooms, the machinery for an elevator that had been built in when some Gibney developed a heart condition, and two hand-operated dumb-waiters that came down from the kitchen area. You could actually get lost in The Catacombs if you didn't know your way around.

One of the old coal furnaces, installed before modern conversion to oil heat, had been left for use as an incinerator. I wanted to have a look at it—just in case. I wanted to find out if someone in a hurry had neglected to make certain that everything burned in that incinerator this morning had not been reduced to ashes.

I remembered that on the north side of the house there was an outside entrance to The Catacombs. To try to go down from inside the house was to risk a head-on encounter with a member of the family, or with one of the horde of servants milling around in the kitchen area where the inside stairway went down into the cellar.

I opened the screen door and walked off the terrace into the now blazing sunlight. There was the faint sound of a radio going somewhere, and I saw that it came from a trooper car now parked

just behind Sheila's Mercedes. A trooper, his wide-brimmed hat pulled down to shield his eyes from the sun, was slumped down behind the wheel listening to the short-wave calls, presumably from his barracks. It was obviously his job to see that none of the family cars left the grounds. There was a shiny black Cadillac parked just beyond the trooper, its license plate indicating that it was Dr. Von Glahn's.

I turned right, walking as casually and aimlessly as I could in case the trooper was watching me. A glittering reflection on the flagstone path in front of me made me look up. The sun was striking full on the big brass bell in the cupola. Horace Gibney had installed that bell almost a century ago, I remembered being told, before there were telephones in the big house, as an alarm system in case help was needed from the village.

I rounded the corner of the house. There didn't seem to be anyone in sight. From some distance away I heard the whir of a power lawn mower but no one was visible on this side of the house. A few yards away I saw the pair of heavy cellar doors, painted green. I'd have to lift them and go down a flight of stone steps to the main cellar door. If that was locked it would take a medieval battering ram to force it open.

I got to the surface doors and lifted one of them. It appeared nobody had opened them for a long time. The crevices were caked with leaves and dirt. It took all the strength I had to loosen the door and then lift it. A blast of damp cool air came up out of the stairwell.

I looked around. Still no one in sight. I went down the steps to the heavy iron-bound main door. It was almost wide enough to drive a truck through. There was an antique wrought-iron latch which stubbornly resisted being moved, but finally I worked it free, put my shoulder against the door, and pushed. After a few moments of strong pressure it gave reluctantly.

I went back up the steps and pulled the open outer door down over my head so that no one from the outside could notice that The Catcombs had been entered. As the door thudded down above me I was suddenly in pitch-darkness.

I made my way down again, my hands feeling along the damp stone wall. I had to push open the big inner door a little wider to make enough room for me to squeeze through into the cellar. It was still totally dark, but I could hear the hum of some sort of machinery and the faint sound of water in the pipes overhead.

There was a certain logic to the idea that there would be a light switch somewhere just inside the door, and presently I found it. One low-watt electric bulb went on in the ceiling a few yards away from me. Stacked around the walls were snow shovels, garden tools, an old toboggan and sleds which probably hadn't been used since the children had grown up. It looked like a neat attic stored with things that would never be used again in a lifetime.

But I got my bearings. A sort of wide corridor would lead the underground length of the house, with rooms opening off both sides. On the left would be Emerson's workshop, the tools, the special stacks of plywood and lumber, all kept in precise order. On the right would be the game room, with the billiard table and the ping-pong gear. On the left again would be Lydia's indoor greenhouse with its fluorescent lights beaming down on the red-clay flowerpots with their eager seedlings.

As I moved along the corridor I saw the glow of that artificial sunlight throwing a cone of light across my path. Just beyond that I knew the corridor opened into a huge room which contained the converted oil burners, the hot-water tanks—and the incinerator-furnace.

I moved quickly, not bothering with lights until I passed the greenhouse and realized I was in the big utility room. I found the light switch, flipped it on, and stood facing my objective. Somehow, in the cold glare of the naked light bulbs, the pipes and furnace looked like a monstrous Rube Goldberg invention.

I touched the outer surface of the old incinerator-furnace. The surface was warm, not hot. The fire that had burned something not long ago was dead. I opened the firebox door but I couldn't see anything inside. I put my face close to the opening and clicked on my cigarette lighter, and suddenly was aware of the odor of burned cloth.

I was looking for scraps of paper—notes—or bits of tape that Traynor had used in his recording machine. I couldn't see any such remains, but in one corner of the firebox my lighter disclosed a small piece of something white. I reached in and retrieved it. It was a piece of cloth, about the size of an old-fashioned pocket watch, charred around the edges.

When I looked at it closely it appeared to be a piece of toweling, or perhaps terrycloth from a robe. I stood scowling at it as my light slowly faded and went out. I turned to move closer to the electric-light bulb which would give me a better light, and the

bulb went out leaving me in darkness. I spun the flint wheel on my lighter and got only sputtering sparks.

And then, instinctively, I did a rolling dive to my right across the floor.

I wasn't alone. Someone, breathing hard, had charged straight at my sparking lighter.

"Lights!" a voice said sharply.

The naked bulb came on again. On his hands and knees, at about the spot where I'd been before I rolled away, was Bob Gibney, a smear of dirt on his yellow shirtfront and on the knees of his yellow slacks.

At the door to this area, his hand on the light switch, was Emerson, squinting at me through his owlish glasses. And blocking the exit behind me, looking like a prehistoric giant, was T. J. Gibney.

"What did he find?" T.J. asked.

"Must have been a piece of the cloth left," Bob said, rising and brushing the knees of his slacks. He was smiling at me but it was a smile totally lacking in humor. "You stupid cluck!" he said. "Why couldn't you mind your own business?"

I still had the little piece of white cloth clutched in my right hand. My lighter had skidded away across the floor. I got to my feet, stuffing the piece of cloth into my jacket pocket. My right shoulder hurt where I'd banged it against the concrete floor.

Not so many months ago I'd walked into a clearing in a South Vietnam swampland and suddenly found myself surrounded by a squad of Vietcong. I knew then that I was dead. I had the same heart-clutching certainty now. In Vietnam a miracle had happened. A 'copter had swept in out of nowhere, spraying the enemy with machine-gun fire. I'd made a headlong dive into a gully, and then the chopper landed and picked me up.

There was going to be no chopper to save me here.

"Is there any point in trying to reason with him?" Emerson asked.

"Never reason with an honest man," Bob said bitterly.

"If you hadn't been an idiot and burned the damn thing, Emerson," T.J. said. He was clenching his huge fists. The cellar was cool but I could see the beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Whatever you have in' mind," I heard myself say, "you know you can't get away with it. How would you explain my disappearance, if that's what it's to be?"

"Suppose we ask you, Johnny," Bob said. He took a couple of tentative steps toward me. "We want that piece of cloth you found. We want your silence. We want Laura's silence. How do we get those things?"

"There's a price," Emerson said. "There has to be a price."

"So name it, Johnny," Bob said.

"Economic security," Emerson said. "Freedom to make a life with Laura—if she'll promise to keep on forgetting."

"All he wants," T.J. said in a bitter voice, "is to get out of this cellar in one piece and start blabbing. You can't buy anything from his kind. I tell you, he'll promise anything and then talk his head off the minute he's safe."

"I'm sorry, Johnny," Bob said. "I have to agree with T.J. You're a hopeless case."

It came to me like a sudden tornado. Bob launched himself at me, a yellow streak in the semidarkness. I should have guessed how rough he could be. He'd spent his whole life staying in shape, learning the arts of violence just for the fun of it. I should have guessed he would know the techniques of karate—and of killing.

True, I had learned the countermoves by heart in special guerilla warfare training, but you have to be a special kind of person to use them without any hesitation. You temporize for just a split second, thinking that what's happening can't be true—and then it's too late.

I went hurtling over Bob Gibney's shoulder to smash into the concrete wall. He was on me almost before I could struggle to my knees. And now he wasn't alone.

T.J. had my right arm, twisting it into an agonizing lock behind my back, and I saw Emerson coming at me with some sort of iron bar or poker in his hands. Bob, directly in front of me, smashed at my face with bone-crushing fists. The pain was unbelievable. I tasted blood and my vision was a red fog.

I managed somehow to twist to one side and launch a kick at the Old Man's groin with everything I had left. I heard him scream out in agony and the paralyzing armlock was released. I saw him reel away, double over, grab at himself.

My head nearly came off my neck as Bob Gibney caught me with a haymaker right to the jaw and then I was caught in another karate chop and thrown violently against the wall again. I slid down to a sitting position, making some kind of animal sounds in an almost paralyzed throat. I saw Emerson standing

over me, the iron bar raised to smash in my skull. I remember covering my head with my arms in a futile gesture of defense.

And then I heard it. The bell! The great brass bell in the cupola was ringing wildly. I saw Emerson freeze, his face turned away and up. Bob, whose hand was drawn back ready for a lethal throat chop at my Adam's apple, was a yellow statue. A few yards away T.J. was down on his knees moaning, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

Then there were women's voices, loud and hysterical, and the clatter of feet on the wooden stairway leading down from the kitchen, and then, of all things, the glistening bald head of Manuel Zack as he leaned over me.

"What the holy hell is going on here?" I heard him ask, before I slipped away into blackness and void. . .

I opened my eyes to look up into the pale face of Dr. Von Glahn. I could feel him gently touching the bruises on my face and head, and his hands weren't steady. Sunlight was pouring through an open window, and the sun felt warm and reassuring. I tried moving and let out a yelp. There wasn't an inch of my body that wasn't in agony, but my legs and arms moved. I saw the red tip of Von Glahn's tongue moisten his lips.

"He's coming around," he said.

"Thank God," I heard a voice say; I recognized it as Sheila Gibney's.

"Don't try to sit up," Von Glahn said, as I made the effort.

But I made it. They'd stretched me out on a couch in the high-ceilinged living room, just inside from the terrace. I reached in my pocket and felt for the little piece of cloth I'd found in the incinerator. Whatever it meant, the Gibney men had been prepared to murder me in cold blood to get it.

Sheila Gibney was standing just behind the doctor. Her cat's-eyes had lost their brilliance, but, like her husband just before he'd tried to kill me, she was forcing a smile.

"I told you I'd lie you into the electric chair, Johnny, if Bob was involved," she said. "You know what happened? I turned into a Swiss bellringer."

"You rang the bell?" I sounded as though I had a bad laryngitis. One of Bob Gibney's chopping blows had caught me in the neck.

"I had to get you help somehow," she said.

"Why?"

"Before Bob was in this mess beyond recall," she said.

My own smile was internal. I couldn't move my swollen lips enough to show it. "How much deeper do you want him to get than attempted homicide?" I asked. "Those three meant to kill me. I'm not likely to let them off that hook. I was within one bell-ring of having my skull smashed in like an eggshell." I looked at Von Glahn. "Laura?"

"Asleep. Safe," Von Glahn said.

"Can I talk to her?"

"In six or eight hours. She won't come around before that."

I looked back at Sheila. "I'd like it if someone would tell me what this is all about," I said.

"Zack's got everyone in T.J.'s study," she said. "I was to let them know if you were able to join them."

"I can make it." I wished I hadn't tried when I stood up.

I walked across what seemed like miles of entrance hall to the door of the study. Sheila knocked and Mike Sayers promptly opened it from the inside.

It was a beautiful book-lined room, furnished with heavy green-leather furniture—couches and armchairs—and a huge flat-topped desk carved by some Florentine artist.

Bob and Emerson were sitting side by side on one of the couches, like two schoolboys called into the principal's office. I noticed, with some satisfaction, that Bob's handsome face was a little chewed up.

T.J., looking a little green, was sitting in the tremendous armchair behind his desk, his heavy eyelids almost closed. I knew he was aware of my entrance but he made no sign, spoke no words. Lydia, her eyes shielded by the black glasses against the sunlight that streamed through the east windows, sat like a motionless statue in a straight-backed chair across the room from her husband. A little nerve kept jerking under one cheekbone.

Manuel Zack stood just behind T.J.'s chair, his face deadpan. Off to the right of the desk a trooper sat in front of a stenotype machine. Mike Sayers guarded the door.

Zack looked at me. "You okay?"

"Guess again," I said.

"Find yourself a place to sit," he said.

Sheila, who had come in with me, touched my arm and we sat down together on the empty couch which faced her husband and Emerson.

"We're just getting started here," Zack said. "Read back from the beginning."

The stenotype operator fingered the paper tape. "Question: You care to make a statement, Mr. Gibney? T. J. Gibney: I'm ready. Mr. Zack: Go ahead then. T. J. Gibney: I killed Julian Traynor. I arranged to meet him at the pool during the party. When everybody was in bed he went down for a swim and I followed him a few minutes later. Mr. Zack: Was it daylight? T. J. Gibney: It was just getting light."

There was something eerie about listening to the words read in the trooper's monotone voice.

"Mr. Zack: You went down to the pool prepared to kill him? T. J. Gibney: I was prepared to kill him. I went to the tool shed first and got those garden shears. Unless I could make Traynor listen to reason I meant to kill him. Mr. Zack: Reason with him about what?" The trooper looked up. "That's as far as we'd gotten, Mr. Zack."

"All right, I repeat the question, T.J.," Zack said. "Reason with him about what?"

The heavy eyelids lifted. "He was blackmailing me," T. J. said. "I had to arrange for a payoff that I knew he would honor, or get rid of him, permanently."

"What did he have on you?"

"Don't be a fool, Zack. If I would risk killing him to keep it a secret, am I likely to tell you what it was now? We talked about a money payoff and he just laughed at me. He wanted more than money. He wanted power and position. I saw that I was saddled with him for the rest of my life, so—so I ran him through with the shears."

"And then?"

"I threw away the gloves I was wearing, left the shears there on the grass, and came back to the house."

"Were you aware that Miss Laura Gibney had seen you?"

T.J.'s mouth twitched. "No, I wasn't."

"What happened then?"

"I woke my two sons and told them what I'd done. I needed their help."

"Help to do what?"

"To get rid of Traynor's body, for one thing. He'd been planning to go into New York. I thought of dressing the body, putting it in his car, and then wrecking the car somewhere down the line."

"You said, 'for one thing.' What other thing?"

"He had evidence of what he was holding over me. Certain documents—and I thought he might have made a tape in case anything happened to him. I told Emerson to look for those items and to burn them if he found them."

"And did he do what you asked?"

"Yes. He found the evidence and he burned it in the incinerator in the cellar. Bob and I went out to deal with the body. We were too late. My daughter and Palmer had already discovered it."

"So you decided to frame one or both of them and you called me and you fed me a large wad of malarkey," Zack said, his voice angry.

"I had to throw you off the trail. If Laura and Johnny really got cornered I'd have come forward," T.J. said.

"You say!" Zack said, his voice rising. "But you and your sons were ready to kill again when you found Palmer nosing around the incinerator."

"Let me make one thing clear to you," T.J. said grimly. "If Emerson botched the burning of that evidence and Palmer found it I had the same situation on my hands all over again."

"And your sons were willing to help you kill Palmer?"

"To get back the evidence. To make certain," T.J. said.

"It must have been quite a thing that Julian Traynor found out about you," Zack said. He turned to Emerson. "What exactly was it you burned, Mr. Gibney?"

Emerson moistened his lips. "Some—some papers and—and a tape," he said.

"Did Palmer have parts of those papers and that tape when you found him in the basement?"

"We—we thought he must have," Emerson said.

Zack turned to me. "What *did* you find, Palmer?"

T.J. and his two sons were staring at me. I had the feeling they were silently pleading with me not to speak. I didn't feel kindly toward them, to make the understatement of the year. I reached in my pocket and took out the small piece of charred toweling.

"*That's* what you found?" Zack asked, his eyes widening.

"*That's* all there was," I said. "The rest was ashes."

"And they tried to kill you for *that*?"

There was a kind of choking sound. I turned my head and I saw that it had come from Lydia. She had risen from her chair, her hands locked, her knuckles white.

"I'm sorry to have caused you so much trouble and the loss of so much time," she said in an oddly reasonable voice.

"Lydia, stop it!" T.J. bellowed at her.

Bob and Emerson were on their feet. "Forget it, Mother," Bob said. "There's a way to ride this out. Trust us."

Lydia ignored the men in her family. "That little piece of cloth, Mr. Zack, is the remains of a terrycloth coat of mine. It was rather horribly bloodstained, which is why the boys burned it. You see, I killed Julian Traynor."

T.J. lowered his head onto his clenched fists resting on the desk. His big shoulders heaved. We all watched, hypnotized, as Lydia moved to him and put one of her hands on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry, my darling," Lydia said gently. She made an unexpected gesture. She rolled up the sleeve of her sweater and held out her arm toward Zack. "As you can see, Mr. Zack, I have been a narcotics addict for some time."

"Oh, God," Bob Gibney said, and turned toward Sheila. There were tears in his eyes and I saw Sheila hold out her hand to him.

"I would prefer, in a more private moment, to give you the details—if you must have them, Mr. Zack," Lydia said. "I have had problems in my life—with alcohol and—and with other things." Her hand tightened on T.J.'s shoulder. "When Julian came to live here while he worked on the Gibney book I liked him. He seemed such a kindly, warm, understanding young man, full of gentle humor. I—I found myself thrown with him a great deal, and of course he had many questions to ask me about T.J.—all quite natural. I was almost old enough to be his mother, you understand.

"Then one day he discovered my secret—a secret I thought I'd managed to keep from my family. I expected, if anything, help and sympathy from him. Instead he became a kind of monster. He found a way to control my supply." Her mouth trembled. "He forced me to become his creature. I must come to his room whenever he said so. I must meet him in New York whenever he said so. I—I became his slave. I—I have been quietly going out of my mind.

"I said he had found a way to control my supply of heroin. Last night, before the party, I needed it desperately. He held out on me. He said he would give it to me when the party was over. I was to meet him at the pool where we could be alone. He implied there would be new demands—money demands. I knew he would

ask for more than I could give him without T.J.'s finding out the truth. I could not bear to have that happen."

She touched T.J.'s bearded cheek with her fingers. "T.J. would have believed I could stop by sheer will power. It meant cold turkey. You know what that means, Mr. Zack?

"I guess I went a little out of my mind. I decided I couldn't stand another day of Julian—not another hour of him. So I decided, quite unhyysterically, to kill him. After the party I changed into some garden clothes and my terrycloth coat. It was quite cool just before morning. I went to the tool shed and got a pair of gloves and the shears and then went to the pool to wait for him.

"Julian wasn't surprised to see the shears and the garden gloves. I often did work in my garden in the dawn hours. I—I don't sleep well." She took a deep breath, then went on, "He told me what his new demands were—the money—and how it was to be delivered to him. And I sat there beside him, listening, and I told myself I would—I would count to ten and then I would kill him. So I began to count, slowly, to myself. And—and when I came to ten I—I plunged the shears into his body.

"He—he tumbled backwards into the pool, but as he fell—well, blood spurted out of him and all over my terrycloth coat. I dropped the shears and threw away the gloves. And then—"

She suddenly lifted her hands and covered her face, her whole body shaking as though she'd had some kind of seizure. But she controlled it. "And then somebody started screaming and I looked up the bank toward the house, and there was Laura. I cried out to her and she turned away from me. I—I started up after her and when I got to the top of the bank T.J. came running out of the house and then Bob and Emerson were there. And I told them.

"They got me into the house and Emerson took my blood-stained coat and T.J. kept telling me he'd protect me and the truth need never come out and that surely Laura could be persuaded to keep silent when she knew the truth. But—but when they found Laura, Johnny was with her and Laura had gone into shock, and there was no way of telling what would happen when she came out of it. We could only wait and see.

"I've sometimes thought T.J.'s way of handling things was—was evil. But in all honesty I hoped he would be successful this time. I—I have no regrets about killing Julian Traynor. He was—he was monstrous." She drew another deep breath. "And that's the way it was, Mr. Zack."

No one spoke. No one moved for a few moments, and then T.J. got up from his chair and put an arm around his wife.

"I would have protected you from this, any way on earth, Lydia," he said. He looked over the top of her head at us. "She was driven beyond endurance by that blackguard!" he said. "There must be a way we can help her." He looked at me. "Johnny, I'm sorry. We've all gone a little out of our heads, I guess. When you found that piece of cloth we knew that sooner or later it would be traced to my wife. We were all ready to do anything on earth to save her. I would have smashed you or anyone else in the world to save her."

He meant it. He would have taken the rap for her if she had let him.

"I won't complicate your situation, Mr. Gibney, by bringing charges against you and your sons—on one condition," I said.

"What condition?"

"I'd like to wait in Laura's room till she wakes up," I said. "I'd like to be with her then. If she wakes up remembering, it's going to be a very bad time for her."

Lydia looked at me, and two large tears were running down under the rims of her black glasses. "She may never want to lay eyes on me again, Johnny. Be kind to her. Please, be kind to her."

"I promise," I said.



# Charles Einstein

## My Brother's Keeper

*Is there a new endplay to the identical-twin gambit? Play the game for yourself . . .*

I have a theory that when identical twins are born, the one born second must be the one who lacks originality. This, I believe, was certainly true in the case of my brother Joseph and myself. He lacked originality, I think, even in his criminal turn of mind. Thus, when he proposed that we be partners in crime—that one twin would commit the crime and the other would have himself "seen" in another city so as to establish an alibi "proving" that the perpetrator actually must have been somewhere else—all he was doing, in truth, was reacting to a newspaper story he had read back in the 1950's, describing two identical twins who were on the F.B.I.'s wanted list. They were jewel thieves. One would stick up a store in San Francisco while the other was in Chicago, living a normal and extremely public life.

"It's foolproof, Eddie," Joe said to me.

"It isn't foolproof, Joe," I said to him. "If it was, the F.B.I. wouldn't know about it."

We looked alike, we walked alike, we talked alike—but we thought quite differently. Our only real physical difference was that for some strange reason—again, I believe, the result of my having been born first—Joe's feet were bigger than mine, nearly two sizes larger. This, in my judgment, was a compensation—nature's way, if you like, of giving him more feet to make up for less head.

By "less head" I mean, if you please, less brains. One does not like to talk this way about his own identical twin, but the truth is the truth.

I say these things, too, more in sorrow than anger, for I was not only Joe's brother but his lawyer as well, and when he went to jail for embezzlement, Miss Bates and I were the only visitors he ever had. Miss Bates is my secretary. We used to visit Joe to-

gether at the State Prison. Because I was his lawyer we were entitled to visit with him not in the large Visitors' Room, where a glass-and-wire barrier separates you from the prisoner, but in the so-called "lawyer's room," which was a private cubicle. This is standard procedure in most prisons, but it fascinated my brother Joe.

"You could slip a knife to me," he suggested.

"I could," I said, "but I won't. All it would result in would be more trouble for you and me."

"So I rot in jail," he said.

"You do not rot in jail," I said. "I'm arranging for your parole."

"Nobody would ever know about the knife," he said. "They're very loose about things around here."

"Less loose than you think," I told him.

"What about Miss Bates coming here?" he said.

"What about her?"

"She signs your signature in the Visitors' Book," he said; "and nobody ever notices."

"What difference does that make?"

"She can imitate your signature close enough to fool them," he said.

"So what?" I said. "She's from my office and she's with me. All she does is sign my name. Imitating my signature doesn't have anything to do with it."

"But she *can*," he said. "Can't you, Miss Bates?"

"Yes," Miss Bates said. "When I was in college I worked in the office of the lieutenant governor, signing his name to letters and proclamations. I am very good at imitating signatures."

"You see?" Joe said to me.

"I do not see," I said.

"What do you need to get away with forgery?" Joe said. "You need somebody who can imitate somebody else's handwriting. With Miss Bates here, we have it ready-made. She can imitate any signature she sees. The three of us together could—"

And he was off again, sitting there in jail, outlining a new career in crime—and one just as unoriginal as the one that had put him behind bars. After a while Fat Louis, the prison guard, rapped on the door and said, "Time's up." I was never so happy to see anyone in my life.

In due course Joe's parole came through. We got him a job in a foundry and turned him toward a gainful life; but always in the

back of his mind, I knew, was one of those silly schemes of his, and when he started dating Miss Bates I reacted badly.

"He doesn't want you for yourself," I warned Miss Bates. "He wants you for your penmanship."

"No," she said. "It is a physical thing."

"He wants to make a criminal out of you," I insisted.

"No," she said. "He wants to make a fallen woman out of me."

"Has he succeeded?"

"No."

"Well," I said. "He has a job and a car. He is a member of society once again. He's entitled to a sex life, I suppose. But not with you, Miss Bates. I have designs on you myself."

"So I noticed," she said.

"Then why do you keep seeing him?"

"For exactly the opposite reason that you suppose," she said. "In my own way I'm trying to rehabilitate him. Not join him in crime, as you seem to believe."

"But you're not attracted to him?"

"No."

"Then you shouldn't lead him on," I said.

"If you don't want me to I won't," she said.

This conversation, occurring as it did in my bachelor apartment at six o'clock in the morning, was the first inkling I had that Miss Bates was willing to be not just my woman, but my only woman. It was at that precise point that I proposed marriage to her, and she accepted. It was at approximately half a minute past that precise point that I realized how clever a woman can be: by playing up to Joe she had forced a proposal from me, which was exactly what she had wanted.

And the pleasant thing was that I was completely happy about it.

I began to tell her how happy I was. As I did so, the doorbell rang. I went to answer it in my pajamas, and it was Joe standing there.

"Let me in," he said. "I think I did something wrong."

I let him into the living room. "What do you mean, you did something wrong?"

"Violated my parole," he said.

"How?"

"Went out of the state. To Las Vegas. Gambled. Won \$2000."

"Oh, for God's sake," I said.

"You'll have to cover up for me," he said.

"Did anybody see you there?"

"I think so. I signed some checks."

"That was smart."

"It occurred to me," he said, "if I could marry Miss Bates—"

"If you could *what*?"

"If I could marry Miss Bates," he said, "then everything might be all right. I could say I won the \$2000 as a wedding present. It would be a human-interest thing. The parole people would understand."

"The parole people would not—"

"You don't understand," he said to me. "They'd like the idea I've been keeping company with such a nice girl. It's part of my becoming a good citizen again."

"Ah," I said. "I do understand."

"I knew you would," he said

"What I understand," I said, "is that this is another one of your worthless, unoriginal ideas."

"But I love her."

"That's not enough. You'd be better off if you just cool it. Don't tell anybody anything. Maybe you won't be reported. Maybe they won't examine your canceled checks."

"But this way—"

"This way," I said, "all you do is call attention to yourself, and all that will do is make trouble. You know what it means when you violate parole? It's back in the can for good. I'm your lawyer, but I won't be able to help you. This time there's no bail, no trial, not even an arraignment. They just take you, cart you off, slap you back in the cell, and forget you."

He was thinking. "Maybe you're right," he said. "But then, what do I do with the money?"

"The money?"

"The \$2000 I won."

"I don't know. Whatever you do, don't spend it. And don't carry it around with you."

"Can I leave it here?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"But you're my brother," he said.

"I know I'm your brother."

"Besides," he said, "there's the gun."

"The gun?"

He took a pistol out of his pants pocket.

"Where'd you get that?" I said.

"It was one of those things," he said.

Stupid Joe. My twin brother Joe.

"The more I think about it, the more I guess you're right," he said. "I'll have to leave it here. At least for the time being."

"The money?"

"The money and the gun both."

"I don't want them here."

"It won't be a problem," he said. "There must be a place. At least till you think of a better somewhere—"

"No—" I began, but it was too late. He was off into the bedroom, with me following, and there was Miss Bates.

When I got in there, Joe turned and pointed the gun at me.

"Get your pants on," he said. "And a shirt. You and I are going to take a ride in my car."

"Joe," I said. "Calm down."

"This is what I get," he said. "My whole life was wrapped up in this woman."

"It wasn't what you thought," I said. "Miss Bates and I are going to be married."

His jaw tightened. "That makes it worse," he said. "To think. My own brother." He waved the gun. "I mean it. Get dressed. Fast! Don't worry about taking your wallet and your keys. Where you're going, you won't need them."

Once again he had not thought things through. It was dangerous for him to leave Miss Bates here alone. Suppose she called the police? But it was nothing I could mention to him, for if I did he'd have taken her along too.

So: "Cool it," I said to Miss Bates, and she knew what I meant. I had talked Joe out of things before, and would again.

Meanwhile, I got into my clothes and went downstairs with him to his car. He drove to an isolated place outside of town where they had once done some steam mining, stopped the car, and again pointed the gun at me.

I said to him, "Give me that thing."

"No," he said. "I'm going to kill you."

"Give me the gun," I said.

"No."

"The gun, Joe!"

All of a sudden a meekness came over him. He realized what he was doing and handed me the gun.

I shot him with it. Six times. To make sure, and also to get rid of all the bullets. Then I took his money, his wallet, his ring, and his watch.

I guess the truth of it was I didn't want him pestering Miss Bates any more. After all, if a woman likes one identical twin, she might also like the other.

Part of the steam mine was an open crater, where they had capped a runaway flow, and into this crater I dumped Joe's body and watched it disappear from view. Then I got back in the car and returned to my place. I would have to abandon the car somewhere else, later in the day.

But they were waiting for me when I drove up—two policemen and the parole officer.

"Hello, Joe," the officer said.

I started to say, "I'm not Joe, I'm Eddie"—but then what would I say next? Here I was in possession of his car, his keys, his wallet, his ring, his money, his watch. And as for Joe himself, I had just finished—

"All right," I said. "I'll go quietly."

"You want to give us the gun and the money, Joe?"

I turned over the gun and the \$2000, and I got in the back of the police car.

Halfway to State Prison I said, "Can I make a phone call?"

"To who?"

"My brother."

"No."

"He's also my lawyer."

"That's right," the parole officer said. "Okay. Once we get to the prison you can make that one call."

We got to the prison—I noticed that Fat Louis, the guard, was happy to see me—and they let me go into a booth to make one call.

I called Miss Bates, who was still in my apartment.

"How did things come out?" she said.

"Joe's back in jail," I said. "They were waiting for him. As for me, I've got to be out of town for a few days. Meanwhile, I want you to go visit Joe on Tuesday—first visitors' day."

"But you won't be with me?"

"No. This time you don't sign me in as his lawyer. Just sign yourself in, and you can see him in the regular Visitors' Room. I'll be back on Thursday."

"All right," she said. "I love you, Eddie."

"I love you, too," I said and hung up.

"Ready, Joe?" Fat Louis called out.

"Ready," I said, and went along with him to my cell.

On Tuesday, Miss Bates came to see me. We viewed each other through the grillework. "My God," she said. "You're not Joe. You're Eddie."

"You're the only person in the world who knows it," I said.

"Now, here is what you must do, in addition to keeping your voice down while we talk. Come back on Thursday, sign my name as my lawyer—the way you've always done before. Understand? You put down *my* signature."

"So I can see you in the private room," she said.

"No," I said. "Just sign the book and mingle with the other visitors. Hang around for ten or fifteen minutes. Then leave. Don't try to see me."

"I don't understand," she said.

"You will," I said. "Meanwhile, trust me and keep your mouth absolutely shut. Officially, I'm out of town on business. This has all been a terrible mistake."

"But—"

"No buts," I said. "Just do what I told you."

She did exactly what I told her. On Thursday morning Fat Louis came and opened the cell door and said, "Joe, your brother Eddie's here to see you. In the lawyer's room."

"Let's go," I said.

I followed him downstairs, and when we got into the little corridor just outside the "lawyer's room," I turned and hit Fat Louis as hard as I have ever hit anybody in my life.

He turned, bleeding from the mouth, and I hit him again. Then he grabbed me and we wrestled. He's a big guy, Fat Louis, and I didn't last long.

"Straight to the Warden with you, Joe," he said.

We went straight to the Warden.

"Joe," the Warden said, "what is this?"

"What this is," I said, "is that I'm not Joe. I'm his lawyer, his brother, his identical twin. My name is Eddie, not Joe."

"He's crazy," Fat Louis said, and told the Warden what had happened.

"No," I said. "It wasn't quite that way. What happened was that I went in the lawyer's room and Fat Louis here brought Joe down

to see me, and as soon as the door closed, Joe pulled a knife on me."

"Where'd he get the knife?" the Warden said.

"How do I know?" I said. "Why don't you ask Fat Louis here, so he can add something to that crazy story he's already given you about how I suddenly tried to beat him up in the hall? Anyway, Joe forced me to change clothes with him—put his prisoner's clothes on me—and then left me screaming and yelling. Fat Louis came in and of course I struggled with him. Tried to explain what happened. He wouldn't believe me, that's all."

"You mean Joe forced you to switch places with him and then—"

"Of course!" I said. "I'm Eddie! Sure, I look like Joe, but if you want to check, check it. Check my fingerprints. Check my signature in the Visitors' Book. Check my shoes, for God's sake! Look at these shoes—two sizes bigger than my feet! How do you think that happened?"

"Then there's been a jail break," the Warden said.

"That's your problem," I said.

"And the guard here—"

"Fat Louis?" I said. "He's your problem too. If you want to think my brother had help from the inside, I can't stop you."

To this day I have not told Miss Bates, who is now my wife, the whole story, even though a wife may not testify against her husband. She thinks that I sacrificed myself by going to jail in Joe's place, then employed this clever ruse to get out, all in order to protect my brother. What she does not know is that he was dead at the time.

They found his body the other day. A new gush of steam had pushed it back to the surface of the crater. The body was badly decomposed, but they identified him through his dental charts. I don't know how carefully they're looking for his murderer. They reason, perhaps, that anyone with his record, who could stage a prison break like that just after violating parole, was bound to come to a violent end. Unimaginative people often do.

"Q"

# **Georges Simenon**

## **Inspector Maigret Investigates**

*Observe the large gentleman in a heavy overcoat constantly puffing on his pipe as he sits close to the stove in a Rue Pigalle restaurant and nurses a coffee and a small calvados... It is Inspector Maigret hard at work with his own special technique—building up theories of what had happened and rejecting them, one after the other... a "classic" case, for reasons you will find out, and what might be called a "classic" deduction since it is based, in equal parts, on professional skill and on knowledge of people—Inspector Maigret's "long suits"...*

### **Detective: INSPECTOR MAIGRET**

A nyone dropping in at Marina's would no doubt have been completely taken in! Lucien, the *patron*, in a thick fawn sweater which made him look shorter and broader, was fussing about with his bottles behind the bar, decanting, recorking, meticulously changing the washer on the tap. And if he was surly, that could be put down to the early hour and the weather.

It was a gray morning and colder than usual, a morning that might bring snow, a morning to linger in bed. It was just nine o'clock, and the Rue Pigalle was not very lively.

The chance customer would have wondered who that large gentleman was, sitting there in a thick overcoat and smoking his pipe, with his back against the stove, nursing a drink in his hand. He would certainly not have thought of Chief Inspector Maigret of Police Headquarters.

On the floor, dusting the table legs, he might have noticed a Breton servant girl, Julie, with a scared look, her face covered with freckles, and her clothes in rags.

In the Rue Pigalle restaurants, business rarely starts early. The clearing up had not been done. Dirty glasses were still standing

about, and through the open door into the kitchen could be seen the *patronne*, Marina herself, looking more bedraggled and lopsided than her servant girl.

It was all rather peaceful and familiar. Two men were still sitting at the back table, but they didn't look so bad, although they were unshaven, and their suits were creased as if they had been up all night.

In fact, the casual customer would have seen nothing there but a small restaurant like any other, a restaurant with a regular clientele. Not very clean, admittedly, but not a bad place on a chilly morning.

He would, no doubt, have changed his mind if he had seen Maigret, suddenly noticing on the coat stand a camel's-hair coat belonging to one of the customers, advance on it, put his hand in the pockets, and draw out, without any sign of surprise, a compact American rubber truncheon. Even more so if he had heard the Inspector remark cheerfully, "Hey, Christiani—is that still my one?"

Half an hour earlier, as he was arriving at the Quai des Orfevres, Maigret had been called to the telephone by someone who insisted on speaking to him personally. The caller was obviously trying to disguise his voice.

"Is that the Inspector himself? Well, then, there was quite a to-do last night at Marina's. If you took a little walk that way you'd perhaps meet your friend Christiani. And it might occur to you to ask him for news of Martino—you know, the youngster from Antibes whose brother's just been shipped off to Guiana?"

Five minutes later Maigret had found out from the exchange that the telephone call had come from a tobacconist's in the Rue Notre Dame de Lorette. A quarter of an hour later he got out of a taxi at the corner of Rue Pigalle where, at that time, the gutters were heaped high with rubbish.

Maigret, who still knew nothing, would have sworn it was a serious matter—probably very serious, for informers like that rarely made up their stories.

The proof he had immediately, as he was walking slowly up the street. Almost opposite Marina's, and wedged surprisingly between the night clubs, he spotted a small bar like those in Auvergne. In this bar, on the lookout close to the window, the Inspector recognized two men, from Nice and Pepito, who were not usually to be met with so early, especially in such a place.

The next moment he was pushing open the door of the restaurant on the other side of the street. At the back he caught sight of Christiani in the company of a young recruit, René Lecœur, who was called the Bank Clerk, because he had worked in a bank at Marseilles.

In this kind of affair it is better not to be surprised by anything. Maigret tipped his hat to them all, just like any old regular coming in for a quick one. "How goes it, Lucien?"

That didn't prevent him from noting that the cloth the *patron* held in his hands was trembling, or that the maid, straightening up suddenly, bumped her head on the table.

"Busy last night? Give me a coffee and a small calvados." Then, going into the kitchen, "How are you, Marina? I see someone broke your mirror for you over the bar."

He had noticed immediately that a mirror had been shattered by a revolver shot.

"That was done long ago," Lucien explained hurriedly. "Some fellow I didn't know. He'd just bought a gun, and didn't know it was loaded."

After that it had been slow going. Maigret had been there for more than a quarter of an hour, and not more than twenty remarks had been exchanged. While the maid went on with her work, and Lucien stayed at the bar, and Marina busied herself in the kitchen, the Inspector smoked his pipe, drank his calvados, went over from time to time to glance across at the bistro opposite, and walked back to the stove.

He knew the place like the back of his hand. Lucien, after having been in some trouble in Marseilles, had turned over a new leaf and opened up this little Montmartre restaurant, which he ran with his wife. The clientele was drawn mainly from former pals of his—gangsters, certainly, but most of them had mended their ways and become almost respectable.

Such was the case with Christiani, who ten years before, on being arrested, had not hesitated to cosh Maigret, and who now owned two brothels in Paris and another at Barcelonnette.

It was much the same with the men across the street, especially the Niçois, who owned two brothels, like Christiani, but, unfortunately, was in competition with him.

The Niçois was from the Marseilles gang, as they said in the trade, while Christiani was boss of the Corsicans.

"Tell me, has your little friend over the way been there long?"

"I don't bother about people like that," Christiani retorted scornfully.

"Maybe not. But he—he seems to me to be bothering about you. And, you know, if I didn't know you better, I'd think it was his presence in the little bistro that's preventing you from leaving."

A pause. A mouthful of calvados.

"Yes. I'd figure it out this way. Last night, for one reason or another, something bad must have happened. And since then the Niçois and Pepito have been waiting for you outside so that you've been obliged to sleep sitting up, the pair of you..." While speaking, he had approached the Bank Clerk and was now patting the creases in his jacket.

"Only, I wonder what could have happened, seeing that everyone knows Lucien doesn't like trouble, and you yourself no longer dabble in this sort of thing. By the way, Martino's brother, who embarked from the Ile de Ré yesterday, sends his regards."

All very friendly. Good-humored, too. All the same Christiani had started, and the Bank Clerk jumped to his feet. Taking advantage of this, Maigret patted his pockets and drew out a powerful flick knife. "Dangerous stuff, sonny. Shouldn't go round with toys like that. And you, Christiani, haven't you anything for me in your pocket?"

Christiani shrugged, took out a Smith and Wesson revolver, and handed it over to the Inspector.

"Well! One bullet's missing. No doubt the one that broke the mirror. What really surprises me is that you haven't replaced the bullet, and you haven't bothered to clean the barrel."

He slipped knife, truncheon, and revolver into the pocket of his overcoat and, without seeming to, proceeded to search every corner, even opening the refrigerator and the telephone booth. But, above all, his mind was hard at work. He was trying to understand. He built up hypotheses, and rejected them, one after the other.

"You know the Niçois told Martino that someone squealed on his brother? At least, so I've heard. If I let you go, it's so that you can avoid him, for he could bear you a grudge, and he has a habit of being armed."

"What're you getting at?" grumbled Christiani, who appeared to be keeping as calm as Maigret.

"Nothing. I'd like to see Martino. I don't know why, but I'd be interested to see him."

Meanwhile he had made certain that nobody, alive or dead, was hidden in the restaurant or in either the kitchen or in Lucien and Marina's bedroom, which opened off it.

At half-past nine a delivery man brought in a case of *apéritifs*, and then, almost immediately after, a huge yellow moving van from the firm of Duchemin drew up in front of the building, and left again a little later.

"Marina, give me a slice of that homemade sausage of yours."

Then, suddenly, Maigret's brows furrowed, for out of the bedroom there emerged a new character, who was as surprised as the Inspector.

"Where've you come from?"

"I—I was lying down."

It was Fred, an associate of Christiani's in certain of his businesses. And he was lying, for Maigret had checked that the bedroom was empty.

"From what I can see," the Inspector grumbled, "you are all so attached to this place that you won't leave it. Give me your gun."

Fred hesitated, then handed over his revolver, another Smith and Wesson, fully loaded.

"You'll give it back to me?"

"Maybe. That's going to depend on what Marino tells me. I'm expecting him any minute now... Yes, I told him to meet me here."

He was watching their faces; he saw René Lecœur grow pale and empty his glass.

One more attempt. He had at all costs to hit on it, and Maigret did, the moment he caught sight of a heavy truck passing in the street outside.

"Take the receiver off," he ordered Christiani. He didn't want to go into the booth himself—from there he couldn't keep an eye on his flock.

"Get me Police Headquarters. Ask for Lucas... You've got him? Hand me the receiver."

Luckily the cord was long enough.

"Is that you, Lucas? You're to phone immediately to Duchemin, the moving people. You must trace a van of theirs that has just delivered or picked up something on Rue Pigalle. Understand? See what it is. Quick as you can. I'll stay here, yes."

Then turning toward the kitchen, "What about that sausage, Marina?"

"Here you are, Inspector. Here you are."

"I don't think these gentlemen want any. If I'm not very much mistaken, they aren't feeling hungry."

At ten past eleven everyone was still in his place, including the Niçois and his companion in the bar opposite.

At eleven minutes past eleven Lucas jumped out of a taxi in great excitement, pushed open the door, and signaled to Maigret that he had something important to tell him.

"You can speak in front of these gentlemen—they're friends."

"I was able to catch the van at Boulevard Rochechouart. They picked up a trunk. They were telephoned for from here—a tenant on the third floor, Monsieur Bécheval. A huge trunk, or rather a chest, to be sent by train to Quimper."

"You let it go, I hope?" Maigret said jokingly.

"I had it opened... There was a body inside—Martino, the brother of—"

"I know. Go on."

"Dr. Paul was at home, and he was able to come immediately. I have the bullet, which was still in the wound."

Maigret toyed with it casually, and murmured, as if to himself, "Browning, 6.35. You see how this is turning out. These gentlemen, who spent the night here, have only Smith and Wessons."

There was no way of foreseeing what he was about to do. Even at that moment no casual customer coming in would have sensed anything dramatic. Lucien was still straining himself to keep busy behind the bar.

"Would you like to know what I think? Keep it between ourselves, eh? Last night Martino, who had been drinking too much, made up his mind it was because of Christiani that his brother had been packed off to Guiana. He came back to pay him out, but as it turned out he was so much on edge that he met with an accident."

Even Lucas wondered what his chief was getting at. Christiani lit a cigarette and blew out the smoke with assumed nonchalance.

"Only, the Niçois and Pepito were waiting out in the street. They didn't dare come in, but waited for the others at the door instead.

"D'you see now? That's why our friends here slept sitting up while the Niçois did sentry duty outside and then, at first light, took up his position in the bar. The biggest problem was this bless-

ed corpse, which couldn't after all just be left on Lucien's hands. What would you have done, Christiani? You're a clever man."

Christiani shrugged disdainfully.

"Answer me, Lucien—what is this Bécheval from the third floor?"

"A helpless old man."

"Just as I thought. Someone went up there in the early morning and told him to keep his mouth shut. Before the household awoke they carried the corpse upstairs, going by the back way, and locked it up in one of the old man's chests. Then they telephoned to Duchemin.

"Lucas, go and ask on the third floor if that isn't right. I'm sure they'll come out with a description of our friend Fred here, who took on the job."

"What does that prove?" Fred growled.

"Certainly not that it was you who bumped him off. Marina! Give them some sausage, after all. I'm going to bring them to headquarters and it might take me quite a time to deal with them."

Still no sign of tragedy—as was proved when a cashier came in with a bill and completed his business with Lucien, without noticing anything.

"You've still got nothing to say to me, Christiani?"

"Nothing."

"And you, Bank Clerk? I must say, this is the first time I've found you mixed up in a serious affair."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," the youngster said in a strained voice.

"Then there's nothing to do but wait for Lucas."

They waited. And across the street the others were still waiting, too. And the street got busier as the sky cleared a little and the day brightened.

"Bad luck, Lucien, that this should have happened at your place! Must never let your mirror get broken—it's bad luck."

Lucas came back, announcing, "Just as you said. I found the old man gagged. He gave me a description of Fred, but there was someone else here last night, but he didn't see him. They jumped on him while he was still asleep."

"That's fine! Phone for a taxi. Wait. Phone headquarters as well and ask them to send someone to watch those fellows opposite so that they don't start something."

And scratching his head, Maigret looked at his trio of beauties and sighed, "By then perhaps we'll know which of you did the shooting."

Maigret, like a man with all the time in the world and nothing to do with it, picked one of the tables and spread out on it a real display, placing Christiani's truncheon beside his revolver and Fred's, then putting Lecœur's knife a little distance away.

"Now, don't get worked up about what I'm going to say to you, son," he threw at Lecœur, who looked as if he was about to faint. "This is your first job, but it probably won't be your last. That revolver there, you see, is definitely Christiani's—he's been too long in the game to play around with a little Browning like the one that killed Martino. Fred, too, is an old hand, who prefers serious weapons. When the fighting broke out, Christiani fired, but somebody must have knocked his arm because all he hit was the mirror. Then you, with your little Browning—"

"I haven't got a Browning!" the Bank Clerk managed to bring out.

"Precisely! *It's just because you haven't got one that it must have been you who fired.* Fred kept his gun, because he knew it would prove his innocence. Christiani didn't even clean his, to prove that he fired only one bullet, which didn't hit anybody. They both know what they're about, and they both stuck to the rules. While you—you had to get rid of your revolver since it would have proved you're the murderer. Where did you put it?"

"I didn't kill anyone!"

"I'm asking you where you put it."

"Ask Christiani."

"It's too late to put on an act."

"You won't find a Browning."

Maigret looked at him pityingly and murmured, tight-lipped, "You fool!"

The more so as Martino was not out to get him, and, if he had really fired the shot, it was only to prove to the others that he had the nerve to do so.

When Lucas returned, Maigret said to him in an undertone, "Look everywhere, especially on the roof. They wouldn't have been stupid enough to hide the gun here at Lucien's, or in the old man's place. Oh, yes, at the top of the stairs there's a skylight to the roof."

He led away his troop, while two or three suspiciously

innocent-looking strollers kept watch on the bistro opposite.

Christiani, in his camel's-hair coat, looked like a respectable citizen who was being taken away by mistake and would shortly be released with apologies. Fred swaggered. The Bank Clerk tensed every nerve in his body.

It was *the* classic case. Maigret had always claimed that, but for chance, fifty per cent of criminals would escape punishment, and, but for informers, the other fifty per cent would remain free.

This gave the impression of being a witticism, especially when he rolled it out in his fine gruff voice. All the same, an informer had played a part in it, and then chance had led him to notice the yellow Duchemin moving van. However, that still left a good fraction of professional skill and knowledge of people, and even what is called flair, to play their part, too.

At three in the afternoon the Browning was found on the roof, where it had, in fact, been thrown out through the skylight.

At half-past three the Bank Clerk broke down and confessed, and Christiani, after giving the address of an eminent lawyer, said, "This will get me six months!"

Maigret, without looking at him, said with a sigh, "And that truncheon of yours only cost *me* two teeth..."



## P. D. James

### Murder, 1986

In his "Criminals at Large" column in "The New York Times Book Review" of June 29, 1969, Allen J. Hubin began his weekly reviews as follows: "With some notable exceptions—several novels and a recent collection of short stories by Isaac Asimov, for example—the blending of detective elements with science fiction (as opposed to fantasy) is an art seldom practiced, and still far from full development. This is in part due to a sizable difficulty: avoiding the temptation to solve a baffling crime by whisking a batch of hypothetical science from under the Venusian carpet." Then Mr. Hubin went on to think—to hope—that soon there will be "more of this wedding of genres."

Now, we don't pretend—never have pretended—to be experts in this marriage of genres; indeed, critics (and readers) have taken us sharply to task for some of the detective-sciencefiction selections we have published in EQMM. Well, here is such a "wedding of genres" by P. D. James, and all we ask of Mr. Hubin is: How are we doing? Better? . . .

The girl lay naked on the bed with a knife through her heart. That was the one simple and inescapable fact. No, not simple. It was a fact horrible in its complications. Sergeant Dolby, fighting nausea, steadied his shaking thighs against the foot of the bed and forced his mind into coherence—arranging his thoughts in order, like a child piling brick on colored brick and holding its breath against inevitable tumble into chaos. He mustn't panic. He must take things slowly. There was a proper procedure laid down for this kind of crisis. There was a procedure laid down for everything.

Dead. That, at least, was certain. Despite the heat of the June morning the slim girlish body was quite cold, the rigor mortis already well advanced in face and arms. What had they taught him

in Detective School about the onset of rigor mortis, that inexorable if erratic stiffening of the muscles, the body's last protest against disintegration and decay? He couldn't remember. He had never been any good at the more academic studies. He had been lucky to be accepted for the Criminal Investigation Department; they had made that clear enough to him at the time. They had never ceased to make it clear. A lost car; a small breaking and entering; a purse snatch. Send Dolby. He had never rated anything more interesting or important than the petty crimes of inadequate men. If it was something no one else wanted to be bothered with, send Dolby. If it was something the C.I.D. would rather not be told about, send Dolby.

And that was exactly how this death would rate. He would have to report it, of course. But it wouldn't be popular news at Headquarters. They were overworked already, depleted in strength, inadequately equipped, forced even to employ him six years after his normal retirement age. No, they wouldn't exactly welcome this spot of trouble. And the reason, as if he didn't know it, was fixed there on the wall for him to read. The statutory notice was pasted precisely over the head of her bed.

He wondered why she had chosen that spot. There was no rule about where it had to be displayed. Why, he wondered, had she chosen to sleep under it as people once slept under a Crucifix. An affirmation? But the wording was the same as he would find on the notice in the downstairs hall, in the elevator, on every corridor wall, in every room in the Colony. The Act to which it referred was already two years old.

*PRESERVATION OF THE RACE ACT—1984  
Control of Interplanetary Disease Infection Carriers*

All registered carriers of the Disease, whether or not they are yet manifesting symptoms, are required under Section 2 of the above Act to conform to the following regulations . . .

He didn't need to read further. He knew the regulations by heart—the rules by which the Ipdics lived, if you could call it living. The desperate defense of the few healthy against the menace of the many condemned. The small injustices which might prevent the greatest injustice of all, the extinction of man. The stigma of the Diseased: the registered number tattooed on the left forearm; the regulation Ipdic suit of yellow cotton in summer,

blue serge in winter; the compulsory sterilization, since an Ipdic bred only monsters; the rule prohibiting marriage or any close contact with a Normal; the few manual jobs they were permitted to do; the registered Colonies where they were allowed to live.

He knew what they would say at Headquarters. If Dolby had to discover a murder, it would have to be of an Ipdic. And trust him to be fool enough to report it.

But there was no hurry. He could wait until he was calmer, until he could face with confidence whomever they chose to send. And there were things they would expect him to have noticed. He had better make an examination of the scene before he reported. Then, even if they came at once, he would have something sensible to say.

He forced himself to look again at the body. She was lying on her back, eyes closed as if asleep, light brown hair streaming over the pillow. Her arms were crossed over her chest as if in a last innocent gesture of modesty. Below the left breast the handle of a knife stuck out like an obscene horn.

He bent low to examine it. An ordinary handle, probably an ordinary knife. A short-bladed kitchen knife of the kind used to peel vegetables. Her right palm was curved around it, but not touching it, as if about to pluck it out. On her left forearm the registered Ipdic number glowed almost luminous against the delicate skin.

She was neatly covered by a single sheet pulled smooth and taut so that it looked as if the body had been ritually prepared for examination—an intensification of the horror. He did not believe that this childish hand could have driven in the blade with such precision or that, in her last spasms, she had drawn the sheet so tidily over her nakedness. The linen was only a shade whiter than her skin. There had been two months now of almost continuous sunshine. But this body had been muffled in the high-necked tunic and baggy trousers of an Ipdic suit. Only her face had been open to the sun. It was a delicate nut-brown and there was a faint spatter of freckles across the forehead.

He walked slowly around the room. It was sparsely furnished but pleasant enough. The world had no shortage of living space, even for Ipdics. They could live in comfort, even in some opulence, until the electricity, the television, the domestic computer, the micro-oven broke down. Then these things remained broken. The precious skills of electricians and engineers were not wasted on

Ipdiscs. And it was extraordinary how quickly squalor could replace luxury.

A breakdown of electricity in a building like this could mean no hot food, no light, no heating. He had known Ipdiscs who had frozen or starved to death in apartments which, back in 1980, only six years ago, must have cost a fortune to rent. Somehow the will to survive died quickly in them. It was easier to wrap themselves in blankets and reach for that small white capsule so thoughtfully provided by the Government, the simple painless way out which the whole healthy community was willing for them to take.

But this girl, this female Ipdisc PXN 07926431, wasn't living in squalor. The apartment was clean and almost obsessively neat. The micro-oven was out of order, but there was an old-fashioned electric cooker in the kitchen and when he turned it on the hot plate glowed red. There were even a few personal possessions—a little clutch of seashells carefully arranged on the window ledge, a Staffordshire porcelain figurine of a shepherdess, a child's tea service on a papier-mâché tray.

Her yellow Ipdisc suit was neatly folded over the back of a chair. He took it up and saw that she had altered it to fit her. The darts under the breasts had been taken in, the side seams carefully shaped. The hand stitching was neat and regular, an affirmation of individuality, of self-respect. A proud girl. A girl undemoralized by hopelessness. He turned the harsh cotton over and over in his hands and felt the tears stinging the back of his eyes.

He knew that this strange and half-remembered sweetness was pity. He let himself feel it, willing himself not to shrink from the pain. Just so, in his boyhood, he had tentatively placed his full weight on an injured leg after football, relishing the pain in the knowledge that he could bear it, that he was still essentially whole.

But he must waste no more time. Turning on his pocket radio he made his report.

"Sergeant Dolby here. I'm speaking from Ipdisc Colony 865. Female Ipdisc PXN 07926431 found dead. Room 18. Looks like murder."

It was received as he had expected.

"Oh, God! Are you sure? All right. Hang around. Someone will be over."

While he waited he gave his attention to the flowers. They had struck his senses as soon as he opened the door of the room, but

the first sight of the dead girl had driven them from his mind. Now he let their gentle presence drift back into his consciousness. She had died amid such beauty.

The apartment was a bower of wild flowers, their delicate sweetness permeating the warm air so that every breath was an intimation of childhood summers, an evocation of the old innocent days. Wild flowers were his hobby. The slow brain corrected itself, patiently, mechanically: wild flowers had been his hobby. But that was before the Sickness, when the words "flower" and "beauty" seemed to have meaning. He hadn't looked at a flower with any joy since 1980.

1980. The year of the Disease. The year with the hottest summer for 21 years. That summer when the sheer weight of people had pressed against the concrete bastions of the city like an intolerable force, had thronged its burning pavements, had almost brought its transport system to a stop, had sprawled in checkered ranks across its parks until the sweet grass was pressed into pale straw.

1980. The year when there were too many people. Too many happy, busy, healthy human beings. The year when his wife had been alive; when his daughter Tessa had been alive. The year when brave men, traveling far beyond the moon, had brought back to earth the Sickness—the Sickness which had decimated mankind on every continent of the globe. The Sickness which had robbed him, Arthur Dolby, of his wife and daughter.

Tessa. She had been only 14 that spring. It was a wonderful age for a daughter, the sweetest daughter in the world. And Tessa had been intelligent as well as sweet. Both women in his life, his wife and daughter, had been cleverer than Dolby. He had known it, but it hadn't worried him or made him feel inadequate. They had loved him so unreservedly, had relied so much on his manhood, been so satisfied with what little he could provide. They had seen in him qualities he could never discern in himself, virtues which he knew he no longer possessed. His flame of life was meager; it had needed their warm breaths to keep it burning bright. He wondered what they would think of him now. Arthur Dolby in 1986, looking once more at wild flowers.

He moved among them as if in a dream, like a man recognizing with wonder a treasure given up for lost. There had been no attempt at formal arrangement. She had obviously made use of any suitable container in the apartment and had bunched the plants

together naturally and simply, each with its own kind. He could still identify them. There were brown earthenware jars of Herb Robert, the rose-pink flowers set delicately on their reddish stems. There were cracked teacups holding bunches of red clover, meadow buttercups, and long-stemmed daisies; jam jars of white campion and cuckoo flowers; egg cups of birdsfoot trefoil—"eggs and bacon," Tessa used to call it—and even smaller jars of rueleaved saxifrage and the soft pink spurs of haresfoot. But, above all, there were the tall vases of cow-parsley, huge bunches of strong hollow-grooved stems supporting their umbels of white flowers, delicate as bridal lace, yet pungent and strong, shedding a white dust on the table, bed, and floor.

And then, in the last jar of all, the only one which held a posy of mixed flowers, he saw the Lady Orchid. It took his breath away. There it stood, alien and exotic, lifting its sumptuous head proudly among the common flowers of the roadside, the white clover, campion, and sweet wild roses. The Lady Orchid. *Orchis Purpurea*.

He stood very still and gazed at it. The decorative spike rose from its shining foliage, elegant and distinctive, seeming to know its rarity. The divisions of the helmet were wine-red, delicately veined and spotted with purple, their somber tint setting off the clear white beauty of the lip. The Lady Orchid. Dolby knew of only one spot, the fringe of a wood in old Kent County in the Southeast Province, where this flower grew wild. The Sickness had changed the whole of human life. But he doubted if it had changed that.

It was then that he heard the roar of the helicopter. He went to the window. The red machine, like a huge angry insect, was just bouncing down onto the roof landing pad. He watched, puzzled. Why should they send a chopper? Then he understood. The tall figure in the all-white uniform with its gleaming braid swung himself down from the cockpit and was lost to view behind the parapet of the roof. But Dolby recognized at once that helmet of black hair, the confident poise of the head. C. J. Kalvert. The Commissioner of the Home Security Force in person.

He told himself that it couldn't be true—that Kalvert wouldn't concern himself with the death of an Ipdic, that he must have some other business in the Colony. But what business? Dolby waited in fear, his hands clenched so that the nails pierced his palms, waited in an agony of hope that it might not be true. But

it was true. A minute later he heard the strong footsteps advancing along the corridor. The door opened. The Commissioner had arrived.

He nodded an acknowledgement to Dolby and, without speaking, went over to the bed. For a moment he stood in silence, looking down at the girl. Then he said, "How did you get in, Sergeant?"

The accent was on the third word.

"The door was unlocked, sir."

"Naturally. Ipdics are forbidden to lock their doors. I was asking what you were doing here."

"I was making a search, sir."

That at least was true. He had been making a private search.

"And you discovered that one more female Ipdic had taken the sensible way out of her troubles. Why didn't you call the Sanitary Squad? It's unwise to leave a body longer than necessary in this weather. Haven't we all had enough of the stench of decay?"

"I think she was murdered, sir."

"Do you indeed, Sergeant. And why?"

Dolby moistened his dry lips and made his cramped fingers relax. He mustn't let himself be intimidated, mustn't permit himself to get flustered. The important thing was to stick to the facts and present them cogently.

"It's the knife, sir. If she were going to stab herself, I think she would have fallen on the blade, letting her weight drive it in. Then the body would have been found face downwards. That way, the blade would have done all the work. I don't think she would have had the strength or the skill to pierce her heart lying in that position. It looks almost surgical. It's too neat. The man who drove that knife in knew what he was doing. And then there's the sheet. She couldn't have placed it over herself so neatly."

"A valid point, Sergeant. But the fact that someone considerably tidied her up after death doesn't necessarily mean that he killed her. Anything else?"

He was walking restlessly about the room as he talked, touching nothing, his hands clasped behind his back. Dolby wished that he would stand still. He said, "But why use a knife at all, sir? She must have been issued her euthanasia capsule."

"Not a very dramatic way to go, Dolby. The commonest door for an Ipdic to let life out. She may have exercised a feminine preference for a more individualistic death. Look around this room,

Sergeant. Does she strike you as having been an ordinary girl?"

No, she hadn't struck Dolby as ordinary. But this was ground he dare not tread. He said doggedly, "And why should she be naked, sir? Why take all her clothes off to kill herself?"

"Why, indeed. That shocks you, does it, Dolby? It implies an unpleasant touch of exhibitionism. It offends your modesty. But perhaps she was an exhibitionist. The flowers would suggest it. She made her room into a bower of fragrance and beauty. Then, naked, as unencumbered as the flowers, she stretched herself out like a sacrifice, and drove a knife through her heart. Can you, Sergeant, with your limited imagination, understand that a woman might wish to die like that?"

Kalvert swung round and strode over to him. The fierce black eyes burned into Dolby's. The Sergeant felt frightened, at a loss. The conversation was bizarre. He felt they were playing some private game, but that only one of them knew the rules.

What did Kalvert want of him? In a normal world, in the world before the Sickness when the old police force was at full strength, the Commissioner wouldn't even have known that Dolby existed. Yet here they both were, engaged, it seemed, in some private animus, sparring over the body of an unimportant dead Ipdic.

"It was very hot in the room now and the scent of the flowers had been growing stronger. Dolby could feel the beads of sweat on his brow. Whatever happened he must hold onto the facts. He said, "The flowers needn't be funeral flowers. Perhaps they were for a celebration."

"That would suggest the presence of more than one person. Even Ipdics don't celebrate alone. Have you found any evidence that someone was with her when she died?"

He wanted to reply, "Only the knife in her breast." But he was silent. Kalvert was pacing the room again. Suddenly he stopped and glanced at his watch. Then, without speaking, he turned on the television. Dolby remembered. Of course. The Leader was due to speak after the midday news. It was already 12:32. He would be almost finished.

The screen flickered and the too familiar face appeared. The Leader looked very tired. Even the makeup artist hadn't been able to disguise the heavy shadows under the eyes or the hollows beneath the cheekbones. With that beard and the melancholy, pain-filled face, he looked like an ascetic prophet. But he always had. His face hadn't changed much since the days of his student

protest. People said that, even then, he had only really been interested in personal power. Well, he was still under thirty, but he had it now. All the power he could possibly want.

"And so we must find our own solution. We have a tradition in this country of humanity and justice. But how far can we let tradition hamper us in the great task of preserving our race? We know what is happening in other countries, the organized and ceremonial mass suicides of thousands of Ipdics at a time, the humane Disposal Squads, the compulsory matings between computer-selected Normals. Some compulsory measures against the Ipdics we must now take. As far as possible we have relied on gentle and voluntary methods. But can we afford to fall behind while other less scrupulous nations are breeding faster and more selectively, disposing of their Ipdics, re-establishing their technology, looking with covetous eyes at the great denuded spaces of the world? One day they will be repopulated. It is our duty to take part in this great process. The world needs our race. The time has come for every one of us, particularly our Ipdics, to ask ourselves with every breath we draw: have I the right to be alive?"

Kalvert turned off the set.

"I think we can forego the pleasure of seeing once again Mrs. Sartori nursing her fifth healthy daughter. Odd to think that the most valuable human being in the world is a healthy fecund female. But you got the message, I hope, Sergeant. This Ipdic had the wisdom to take her own way out while she still had a choice. And if somebody helped her, who are we to quibble?"

"It was still murder, sir. I know that killing an Ipdic isn't a capital crime. But the Law hasn't been altered yet. It's still a felony to kill any human being."

"Ah, yes. A felony. And you, of course, are dedicated to the detection and punishment of felonies. The first duty of a policeman is to prevent crime; the second is to detect and punish the criminal. You learned all that when you were in Detective School, didn't you? Learned it all by heart: I remember reading the first report on you, Dolby. It was almost identical with the last. 'Lacking in initiative. Deficient in imagination. Tends to make errors of judgment. Should make a reliable subordinate. Lacks self-confidence.' But it did admit that, when you manage to get an idea into your head, it sticks there. And you have an idea in your head. Murder. And murder is a felony. Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"In cases of murder the body is first examined by the forensic pathologist."

"Not this body, Dolby. Do you know how many pathologists this country now has? We have other uses for them than to cut up dead Ipdics. She was a young female. She was not pregnant. She was stabbed through the heart. What more do we need to know?"

"Whether or not a man was with her before she died."

"I think you can take it there was. Male Ipdics are not yet being sterilized. So we add another fact. She probably had a lover. What else do you want to know?"

"Whether or not there are prints on the knife, sir, and, if so, whose they are."

Kalvert laughed aloud. "We were short of forensic scientists before the Sickness. How many do you suppose we have now? There was another case of capital murder reported this morning. An Ipdic has killed his former wife because she obeyed the Law and kept away from him. We can't afford to lose a single healthy woman, can we, Dolby? There's the rumor of armed bands of Ipdics roaming the Southeast Province. There's the case of the atomic scientist with the back of his skull smashed in. A scientist, Dolby! Now, do you really want to bother the lab with this petty trouble?"

Dolby said obstinately, "I know that someone was with her when she picked the flowers. That must have been yesterday—they're still fresh even in this heat, and wild flowers fade quickly. I think he probably came back here with her and was with her when she died."

"Then find him, Sergeant, if you must. But don't ask for help I can't give."

He walked over to the door without another glance at the room or at the dead girl, as if neither of them held any further interest for him. Then he turned: "You aren't on the official list of men encouraged to breed daughters in the interest of the race, are you, Sergeant?"

Dolby wanted to reply that he'd once had a daughter. She was dead and he wanted no other.

"No, sir. They thought I was too old. And then there was the adverse psychologist's report."

"A pity. One would have thought that the brave new world could have made room for just one or two people who were unin-

telligent, lacking in imagination, unambitious, inclined to errors of judgment. People will persist in going their own obstinate way. Goodbye, Dolby. Report to me personally on this case, will you? I shall be interested to hear how you progress. Who knows, you may reveal unsuspected talents."

He was gone. Dolby waited for a minute as if to cleanse his mind of that disturbing presence. As the confident footsteps died away, even the room seemed to settle itself into peace. Then Dolby began the few tasks which still remained.

They weren't many. First, he took the dead girl's fingerprints. He worked with infinite care, murmuring to her as he gently pressed the pad against each fingertip, like a doctor reassuring a child. It would be pointless, he thought, to compare them with the prints on any of the ordinary objects in the room. That would prove nothing except that another person had been there. The only prints of importance would be those on the knife. But there were no prints on the knife—only an amorphous smudge of whorls and composites as if someone had attempted to fold her hand around the shaft but had lacked the courage to press the fingers firm.

But the best clue was still there—the Lady Orchid, splendid in its purity and beauty, the flower which told him where she had spent the previous day, the flower which might lead him to the man who had been with her. And there was another clue, something he had noticed when he had first examined the body closely. He had said nothing to Kalvert. Perhaps Kalvert hadn't noticed it or hadn't recognized its significance. Perhaps he had been cleverer than Kalvert. He told himself that he wasn't really as stupid as people sometimes thought. It was just that his mind was so easily flustered into incoherence when stronger men bullied or taunted him. Only his wife and daughter had really understood that, had given him the confidence to fight it.

It was time to get started. They might deny him the services of the pathologist and the laboratory, but they still permitted him the use of his car. It would be little more than an hour's drive.

But, before leaving, he bent once more over the body. The Disposal Squad would soon be here for it. He would never see it again. So he studied the clue for the last time—the faint, almost imperceptible circle of paler skin round the third finger of her left hand. The finger that could have worn a ring through the whole of a hot summer day . . .

He drove through the wide streets and sun-filled squares, through the deserted suburbs, until the tentacles of the city fell away and he was in open country. The roads were pitted and unmended, the hedges high and unkempt, the fields a turbulent sea of vegetation threatening to engulf the unpeopled farmlands. But the sun was pleasant on his face. He could almost persuade himself that this was one of the old happy jaunts into the familiar and well-loved countryside of Old Kent.

He had crossed the boundary into the Southeast Province and was already looking for the remembered landmarks of hillside and church spire when it happened. There was an explosion, a crack like a pistol shot, and the windshield shattered in his face. He felt splinters of glass stinging his cheeks. Instinctively he guarded his face with his arms. The car swerved out of control and lurched onto the grass verge. He felt for the ignition key and turned off the engine. Then he tentatively opened his eyes. They were uninjured. And it was then he saw the Ipdics.

They came out of the opposite ditch and moved toward him, with stones still in their hands. There were half a dozen of them. One, the tallest, seemed to be their leader. The others shuffled at his heels, lumpy figures in their ill-fitting yellow suits, their feet brown and bare, their hair matted like animals', their greedy eyes fixed on the car. They stood still, looking at him. And then the leader drew his right hand from behind his back, and Dolby saw that it held a gun.

His heart missed a beat. So it was true! Somehow the Ipdics were getting hold of weapons. He got out of the car, trying to recall the exact instructions of such an emergency. Never show fear. Keep calm. Exert authority. Remember that they are inferior, unorganized, easily cowed. Never drop your eyes. But his voice, even to him, sounded feeble, pitched unnaturally high.

"The possession of a weapon by an Ipdic is a capital crime. The punishment is death. Give me that gun."

The voice that replied was quiet, authoritative, the kind of voice one used to call educated.

"No. First you give me the keys to the car. Then I give you something in return. A cartridge in your belly!"

His followers cackled their appreciation. It was one of the most horrible sounds in the world—the laughter of an Ipdic.

The Ipdic pointed the gun at Dolby, moving it slowly from side to side as if selecting his precise target. He was enjoying his

power, drunk with elation and triumph. But he waited a second too long. Suddenly his arm jerked upward, the gun leaped from his grasp, and he gave one high desolate scream, falling into the dust of the road. He was in the first spasm of an Ipdic fit. His body writhed and twisted, arched and contracted, until the bones could be heard snapping.

Dolby looked on impassively. There was nothing he could do. He had seen it thousands of times before. It had happened to his wife, to Tessa, to all those who had died of the Disease. It happened in the end to every Ipdic. It would have happened to that girl on the bed, at peace now with a knife in her heart.

The attack would leave this Ipdic broken and exhausted. If he survived, he would be a mindless idiot, probably for months. And then the fits would come more frequently. It was this feature of the Disease which made the Ipdics so impossible to train or employ, even for the simplest of jobs.

Dolby walked up to the writhing figure and kicked away the gun, then picked it up. It was a revolver, a Smith and Wesson .38, old but in good condition. He saw that it was loaded. After a second's thought he slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

The remaining Ipdics had disappeared, scrambling back into the hedges with cries of anguish and fear. The whole incident was over so quickly that it already seemed like a dream. Only the tortured figure in the dust and the cold metal in his pocket were witnesses to its reality. He should report it at once, of course. The suppression of armed Ipdics was the first duty of the Home Security Force.

He backed the car onto the road. Then, on an impulse, he got out again and went over to the Ipdic. He bent to drag the writhing figure off the road and into the shade of the hedge. But it was no good. Revolted, he drew back. He couldn't bear to touch him. Perhaps the Ipdic's friends would creep back later to carry him away and tend to him. Perhaps. But he, Dolby, had his own problem. He had a murder to solve.

Fifteen minutes later he drove slowly through the village. The main street was deserted but he could glimpse, through the open cottage doors, the garish yellow of an Ipdic suit moving in the dim interior and he could see other yellow-clad figures bending at work in the gardens and fields. None of them looked up as he passed. He guessed that this was one of the settlements which had grown up in the country, where groups of Ipdics attempted to

support themselves and each other, growing their own food, nursing their sick, burying their dead. Since they made no demands on the Normals they were usually left in peace. But it couldn't last long. There was no real hope for them.

As more and more of them were overtaken by the last inevitable symptoms, the burden on those left grew intolerable. Soon they too would be helpless and mad. Then the Security Force, the Health Authorities, and the Sanitary Squads would move in, and another colony of the dispossessed would be cleaned up. And it was a question of cleaning up. Dolby had taken part in one such operation. He knew what the final horror would be. But now in the heat of this sun-scented afternoon, he might be driving through the village as he had known it in the days before the Sickness, prosperous, peaceful, sleepy, with the men still busy on the farms.

He left the car at the churchyard gate and, slipping the strap of his murder bag over his shoulder, walked up the dappled avenue of elms to the south entrance. The heavy oak door with its carved panels, its massive hinges of hammered iron, creaked open at his touch. He stepped into the cool dimness and smelled again the familiar scent of flowers, musty hymn books, and wood polish, saw once again the medieval pillars soaring high to the hammer beams of the roof, and, straining his eyes through the dimness, he glimpsed the carving on the rood screen and the far gleam of the sanctuary lamp.

The church was full of wild flowers. They were the same flowers as those in the dead girl's apartment but here their frail delicacy was almost lost against the massive pillars and the richly carved oak. But the huge vases of cow-parsley set on each side of the chancel steps made a brave show, floating like twin clouds of whiteness in the dim air. It was a church decked for a bride.

He saw a female Ipdic polishing the brass lectern. He made his way up the aisle toward her and she beamed a gentle welcome as if his appearance were the most ordinary event in the world. Her baggy Ipdic suit was stained with polish and she wore a pair of old sandals, the soles peeling away from the uppers. Her graying hair was drawn back into a loose bun from which wisps of hair had escaped to frame the anxious, sun-stained face.

She reminded him of someone. He let his mind probe once again, painfully, into the past. Then he remembered. Of course. Miss Caroline Martin, his Sunday School superintendent. It

wasn't she, of course. Miss Martin would have been over 70 at the time of the Sickness. No one as old as that had survived, except those few Tasmanian aborigines who so interested the scientists. Miss Martin, standing beside the old piano as her younger sister thumped out the opening hymn and beating time with her gloved hand as if hearing some private and quite different music. Afterward, the students had gone to their different classes and had sat in a circle around their teachers. Miss Martin had taught the older children, himself among them. Some of the boys had been unruly, but never Arthur Dolby. Even in those days he had been obedient, law-abiding. The good boy. Not particularly bright, but well behaved. Good, dull, ineffectual. Teacher's pet.

And when she spoke it was with a voice like Miss Martin's.

"Can I help you? If you've come for Evensong services, I'm afraid it isn't until five thirty today. If you're looking for Father Reeves, he's at the Rectory. But perhaps you're just a visitor. It's a lovely church, isn't it? Have you seen our sixteenth-century reredos?"

"I hoped I would be in time for the wedding."

She gave a little girlish cry of laughter.

"Dear me, you are late! I'm afraid that was yesterday! But I thought no one was supposed to know about it. Father Reeves said that it was to be quite secret really. But I am afraid I was very naughty. I did so want to see the bride. After all, we haven't had a wedding here since—"

"Since the Act?"

She corrected him gently, like Miss Martin rebuking the good boy of the class.

"Since 1980. So yesterday was quite an occasion for us. And I did want to see what the bride looked like in Emma's veil."

"In what?"

"A bride has to have a veil, you know." She spoke with gentle reproof, taking pity on his masculine ignorance. "Emma was my niece. I lost her and her parents in 1981. Emma was the last bride to be married here. That was on April 28, 1980. I've always kept her veil and headdress. She was such a lovely bride."

Dolby asked with sudden harshness the irrelevant but necessary question.

"What happened to her bridegroom?"

"Oh, John was one of the lucky ones. I believe he has married again and has three daughters. Just one daughter more and they'll be allowed to have a son. We don't see him, of course. It

wasn't to be expected. After all, it is the Law."

How despicable it was, this need to be reassured that there were other traitors.

"Yes," he said. "It is the Law."

She began polishing the already burnished lectern, chatting to him as she worked.

"But I've kept Emma's veil and headdress. So I thought I'd just place them on a chair beside the font so that this new bride would see them when she came into church. Just in case she wanted to borrow them, you know. And she did. I was so glad. The bridegroom placed the veil over her head and fixed the headdress for her himself, and she walked up the aisle looking so beautiful."

"Yes," said Dolby. "She would have looked very beautiful."

"I watched them from behind this pillar. Neither of them noticed me. But it was right for me to be here. There ought to be someone in the church. It says in the prayer book, 'In the sight of God and of this congregation.' She had a small bouquet of wild flowers, just a simple mixed bunch but very charming. I think they must have picked it together."

"She carried a Lady Orchid," said Dolby. "A Lady Orchid picked by her bridegroom and surrounded by daisies, clover, white cam-pion, and wild roses."

"How clever of you to guess! Are you a friend, perhaps?"

"No," said Dolby. "Not a friend. Can you describe the bride-groom?"

"I thought that you must know him. Very tall, very dark. He wore a plain white suit. Oh, they were such a handsome couple! I wished Father Reeves could have seen them."

"I thought he married them."

"So he did. But Father Reeves, poor man, is blind."

So that was why he risked it, thought Dolby. But what a risk!

"Which prayer book did he use?"

She gazed at him, the milky eyes perplexed. "Father Reeves?" she asked.

"No, the bridegroom. He did handle a prayer book, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I put one out for each of them. Father Reeves asked me to get things ready. It was I who decorated the church. Poor dears, it wasn't as if they could have the usual printed service sheets. Emma's were so pretty, her initials intertwined with the bridegroom's. But yesterday they had to use ordinary prayer books. I chose them specially from the pews and put them on the

two prayer stools. I found a very pretty white one for the bride and this splendid old book with the brass clasp for the bridegroom. It looked masculine, I thought."

It lay on the book ledge of the front pew. She made a move to pick it up, but he shot out his hand. Then he dropped his handkerchief over the book and lifted it by the sharp edges of the binding. Brass and leather. Good for a print. And this man's palm would be moist, clammy, perhaps, with perspiration and fear. A hot day; an illegal ceremony; his mind on murder. To love and to cherish until death us do part. Yes, this bridegroom would have been nervous. But Dolby had one more question.

"How did they get here? Do you know?"

"They came by foot. At least, they walked up to the church together. I think they had walked quite a long way. They were quite hot and dusty when they arrived. But I know how they really came."

She nodded her unkempt head and gave a little conspiratorial nod.

"I've got very good ears, you know. They came by helicopter. I heard it."

A helicopter. He knew almost without thinking exactly who was permitted the use of a helicopter. Members of the Central Committee of Government; high ranking scientists and technicians; doctors; the Commissioner of the Home Security Force, and his Deputy. That was all.

He took the prayer book out into the sun and sat on one of the flat-topped gravestones. He set up the prayer book on its end, then unzipped his murder bag. His hands shook so that he could hardly manage the brush and some of the gray powder was spilt and blew away in the breeze. He willed himself to keep calm, to take his time. Carefully, like a child with a new toy, he dusted the book and clasp with powder, gently blowing off the surplus with a small rubber nozzle. It was an old procedure, first practiced when he was a young Detective Constable. But it still worked. It always would. The arches, whorls, and composites came clearly into view.

He was right. It was a beautiful print. The man had made no effort to wipe it clean. Why should he? How could he imagine that this particular book would ever be identified among the many scattered around the church? How could he suspect that he would ever be traced to this despised and unregarded place? Dolby took

out his camera and photographed the print. There must be continuity of evidence. He must leave no room for doubt. Then he classified its characteristics, ready for checking.

There was a little delay at the National Identification Computer Center when he phoned, and he had to wait his turn. When it came he gave his name, rank, secret code, and the classification of the print. There was a moment's silence. Then a surprised voice asked, "Is that you, Dolby? Will you confirm your code."

He did so. Another silence.

"Okay. But what on earth are you up to? Are you sure of your print classification?"

"Yes. I want the identification for elimination purposes."

"Then you can eliminate, all right. That's the Commissioner. Kalvert, C. J. Hard luck, Dolby! Better start again."

He switched off the receiver and sat in silence. He had known it, of course. But for how long? Perhaps from the beginning. Kalvert. Kalvert, who had an excuse for visiting an Ipdic Colony. Kalvert, who had the use of a helicopter. Kalvert, who had known without asking that the television set in her room was in working order. Kalvert, who had been too sure of himself to take the most elementary precautions against discovery, because he knew that it didn't matter, because he knew no one would dare touch him. Kalvert, one of the four most powerful men in the country. And it was he, the despised Sergeant Dolby, who had solved the case.

He heard the angry purr of the approaching helicopter without surprise. He had reported the armed attack by the Ipdics. It was certain that Headquarters would have immediately summoned a Squad from the nearest station to hunt them down. But Kalvert would know about the message. He had no doubt that the Commissioner was keeping a watch on him. He would know which way Dolby was heading, would realize that he was dangerously close to the truth. The armed Squad would be here in time. But Kalvert would arrive first.

He waited for five minutes, still sitting quietly on the grave-stone. The air was sweet with the smell of grasses and vibrating with the high-treble midsummer chant of blackbird and thrush. He shut his eyes for a moment, breathing in the beauty, taking courage from its peace. Then he got to his feet and stood at the head of the avenue of elms to wait for Kalvert.

The gold braid on the all-white uniform gleamed in the sun. The tall figure, arrogant with confidence and power, walked un-

hesitatingly toward him, unsmiling, making no sign. When they were three feet apart, Kalvert stopped. They stood confronting each other. It was Dolby who spoke first. His voice was little more than a whisper.

"You killed her."

He could not meet Kalvert's eyes. But he heard his reply.

"Yes, I killed her. Shall I tell you about it, Sergeant? You seem to have shown some initiative. You deserve to know part of the truth. I was her friend. That is prohibited by Regulation. She became my mistress. That is against the Law. We decided to get married. That is a serious crime. I killed her. That, as you earlier explained, is a felony. And what are you going to do about it?"

Dolby couldn't speak. Suddenly he took out the revolver. It seemed ridiculous to point it at Kalvert. He wasn't even sure that he would be able to fire it. But he held it close to his side and the curved stock fitted comfortably to his palm, giving him courage. He made himself meet Kalvert's eyes, and heard the Commissioner laugh.

"To kill a Normal is also against the Law. But it's something more. Capital murder, Dolby. Is that what you have in mind?"

Dolby spoke out of cracked lips, "But why? Why?"

"I don't have to explain to you. But I'll try. Have you the imagination to understand that we might have loved each other, that I might have married her because it seemed a small risk for me and would give her pleasure, that I might have promised to kill her when her last symptoms began? Can you, Sergeant Dolby, enter into the mind of a girl like that? She was an Ipdic. And she was more alive in her condemned cell than you have ever been in your life. Female Ipdic PZN 07926431 found dead. Looks like murder. Remember how you reported it? A felony. Something to be investigated. Against the Law. That's all it meant, isn't it?"

He had taken out his own revolver now. He held it easily, like a man casually dangling a familiar toy. He stood there, magnificent in the sunshine, the breeze lifting his black hair. He said quietly, "Do you think I'd let any Law on earth keep me from the woman I loved?"

Dolby wanted to cry out that it hadn't been like that at all. That Kalvert didn't understand. That he, Dolby, had cared about the girl. But the contempt in those cold black eyes kept him silent. There was nothing they could say to each other. Nothing. And Kalvert would kill him.

The Squad would be here soon. Kalvert couldn't let him live to tell his story. He gazed with fascinated horror at the revolver held so easily in the Commissioner's hand. And he tightened the grip on his own, feeling with a shaking finger for the trigger.

The armored car roared up to the churchyard gate. The Squad were here. Kalvert lifted his revolver to replace it in the holster. Dolby, misunderstanding the gesture, whipped up his own gun and, closing his eyes, fired until the last cartridge was spent. Numb by misery and panic, he didn't hear the shots or the thud of Kalvert's fall. The first sound to pierce his consciousness was a wild screaming and beating of wings as the terrified birds flew high. Then he was aware of an unnatural silence, and of an acrid smell tainting the summer air.

His right hand ached. It felt empty, slippery with sweat. He saw that he had dropped the gun. There was a long mournful cry of distress. It came from behind him. He turned and glimpsed the yellow-clad figure of the female Ipdic, hand to her mouth, watching him from the shadow of the church. Then she faded into the dark.

He dropped on his knees beside Kalvert. The torn arteries were pumping their blood onto the white tunic. The crimson stain burst open like a flower. Dolby took off his jacket with shaking hands and thrust it under Kalvert's head. He wanted to say that he was sorry, to cry out like a child that he hadn't really meant it, that it was all a mistake.

Kalvert looked at him. Was there really pity in those dulling eyes? "Poor Dolby! Your final error of judgment."

The last word was hiccupped in a gush of blood. Kalvert turned his head away from Dolby and drew up his knees as if easing himself into sleep. And Dolby knew that it was too late to explain now, that there was no one there to hear him.

He stood up. The Squad were very close now, three of them, walking abreast, guns at hip, moving inexorably forward in the pool of their own shadows. And so he waited, all fear past, with Kalvert's body at his feet. And he thought for the last time of his daughter. Tessa, whom he had allowed to hide from him because that was the Law. Tessa, whom he had deserted and betrayed. Tessa, whom he had sought at last, but had found too late. Tessa, who had led him unwittingly to her lover and murderer. Tessa who would never have picked that Lady Orchid. Hadn't he taught her when she was a child that if you pick a wild orchid it can never bloom again?

# **Henry T. Parry**

## **Season's Greetings**

*Much has been written, and much more will be written, on how we should spend our leisure time. Are you prepared to retire? How will you pass the hours, the days, the weeks? The method used by the narrator of this story is definitely not recommended...*

Dec. 14

Dear Friends:

This year I've decided to write one of those blanket letters that are getting so popular and wish everybody a Merry Christmas and tell them all the news at the same time.

As most of you already know we moved to Florida last February right after Charley retired and we bought a place in Del Sol, just three blocks in from the Coastal Waterway. All on one floor, which is new for us. But even though the house was fairly new it must have been lived in by someone who had retired from being the caretaker of a town garbage dump. You know that I had a reputation back in Ridgevale of being a fussy housekeeper. Well, I couldn't stand this place, it was that dirty.

I scrubbed and polished and dusted and scraped and painted and waxed and oiled and everything else for three solid weeks just to get that house to the point where you wouldn't be ashamed to keep pigs in it. During that time we lived on frozen food and soda pop that Charley brought in. Charley said it was one of the most prolonged cleaning fits I had ever had. I told him it was nothing of the kind, just any normal person's desire to have cleanliness and order in their house.

Charley said all right but did I really have to wash out the fireplace chimney as far up as I could reach just to be orderly? I might add that I cleaned a bird's nest out of that chimney Charley was so sarcastic about. Gives you an idea of how dirty this place was when we moved in.

Even though I had gotten the house in some kind of order—not to where it ought to be—I kept having the feeling that I hadn't settled down to Florida living yet. Something kept bothering me. There was something out of place and irregular in the way of living down here.

At first I thought it might be the warmer climate or the new breed of insects. Or it might have been the people except I took good care not to have anything to do with the neighbors and I told Charley he'd have to do the same and not pick up with just any old Tom or Dick just because they might have had something in common up North. Then I decided what was bothering me. It was the lot next door.

The lot had about 100 foot frontage and was about 75 feet deep. It was vacant if you call anything vacant that was knee-deep in weeds and had a young forest of scrub oak and pine growing in it. I walked through it and, as I suspected, there was trash hidden in the weeds—a couple of tires, a refrigerator, and about a ton of miscellaneous debris.

Charley told me I was crazy walking through the scrub like that because it wasn't very long ago that this area had been undeveloped and everyone said a pocket of rattlers could have been living there since rattlers were common around here. The neighbors had also been dumping garden trash in the lot but I noticed that nobody ever walked very far in from the street to do it so there might have been something to what Charley said about rattlers.

But the untidy lush growth, the junk that I knew was lying hidden in the brush, and the weeds getting higher each week just bothered me so that I knew I was never going to feel settled until I set that lot to rights.

"Charley," I said, "go down to the real estate office and find out who owns that lot and buy it from them."

Well, Charley let on that it might be a good investment at that but didn't I realize that our income was half of what it used to be before he retired?—and so on and so on.

"Charley," I said, "that lot is driving me out of my mind. I will not live another day next to a transplanted section of the Everglades."

So Charley went down to the real estate office and I got out an ax, a rake, and some weed spray, and set to work. Even if Charley couldn't buy the lot I was determined to clean it up and bring

some order to the place. He got the lot all right but he grumbled about having to pay a thousand dollars more than it was worth but I said it was a good investment and even if it wasn't I was willing to spend a thousand dollars just to remove an eyesore from my view.

It's a good thing I'm 15 years younger than Charley or I couldn't have worked the way I did, especially in that hot sun. I would start at seven in the morning and plug away until before I knew it Charley would be standing there telling me lunch was ready. I was so taken up with what I was doing that it used to give me quite a start sometimes to find Charley standing there.

Anyway, I poisoned every bush, weed, leaf, shrub, and every other green thing that grew on that lot. Then I went in with my ax and I chopped and grubbed everything out of the ground until Charley said the lot looked like a graveyard where the help has suddenly gone on strike.

Charley came out to get me for lunch one day and as he stepped into the clearing where I was working he jumped.

"Holy smoke! Look at that!"

He pointed down at a snake, a rattler, with its head chopped neatly off and its tail still squirming. I was frightened because I didn't remember even seeing it, let alone chopping its head off but I must have hit it when I was hacking at the roots of a scrub oak. I didn't let on to Charley.

"What's there to get excited about? Back in the country a ways I bet the natives kill them all the time. I told you there wasn't anything to worry about as long as you're careful."

Charley looked at me as though I was off my rocker but he didn't say anything, just got out of there, putting his feet down as carefully as a ballet dancer.

It took me nearly six weeks but I got that lot cleaned up and some grass started in it. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction to see it so neat and clean although the neighbors did give me some strange looks when they would drive by and see me chopping away in the hot sun.

Well, I was all right for a month after that but then the feeling came back of something being out of the normal pattern and routine that I was accustomed to. The house was shined up and the lot was coming along but I still felt that the days were not running as smoothly as they had before we moved down here. Then I realized what it was. It was Charley.

After you have had your house to yourself from eight to six every day for 25 or more years, it's upsetting to have someone hanging around the house all day and getting in your way. I encouraged Charley to try fishing, thinking it would keep him out of the house for long periods, but he said the people he met when he tried it just sat around in expensive boats with expensive equipment and exchanged nonsensical talk about what fish liked to eat and what they didn't, as if anyone knew. When I suggested golf to Charley he said he'd just as soon hire himself out to the post office and get paid for walking around in the hot sun pushing a cart.

I'd have been glad to see him get a job in the post office or anywhere just to get him out of the house. To see somebody come into your kitchen and tramp with muddy shoes across a floor you have just waxed or to always have to be after someone to move their chair so you can vacuum where they're sitting. Once I asked him when he was going to start on the three volumes of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" as he always intended. He said that he had let it go too long and that now he wouldn't have the patience to start it, let alone finish it. This was just as well because after I suggested it I realized if he took up reading he'd *always* be around the house.

I made the same mistake again when I asked him why he didn't start writing that book he'd been talking about for so many years; especially when he had a drink or two before dinner, the one exposing the company he worked for and telling about the intrigues that went on. He could never decide whether he would call it "Of Rats and Men" or "Phonies I Have Known." He just gave me a sour look and mumbled maybe they weren't such a bad lot after all.

Then when I mentioned that he might go down to Waterfront Park—this was when I had run out of errands to send him on—and talk to some of the retired men who hung around there I thought he would split a vein in his forehead. He said he'd be a so-and-so before he would sit around in the park with a lot of old coots talking about the jobs they had retired from and waiting to die. Just as soon rent a bench in front of the funeral home so he'd be ready when the call came. Might even stretch out on the bench while waiting and really be ready.

I was about at my wit's end to find something that would keep Charley away from home all day when one day here comes Charley home with one of those green and white folders put out by a

pump company. He'd picked it up at the garden center—they don't say seed store any more—and it said: "Make your own fountain. Dig a hole. Put in a fiberglass pool. Drop in one of our recirculating pumps and you're in for many hours of quiet pleasure."

"Just what do you think you're going to do with that?" I asked.

"I thought maybe since I have so much time on my hands I might dig up at the back property line of the new lot, put in a little pool and one of these little pumps and have a fountain. Or maybe even pile up some rocks and have a waterfall. And instead of one of these fiberglass pools they advertise I thought for the basin part I might make it out of concrete. It would be simple to mix up a batch of cement and sand—"

"Cement and sand! You out of your mind? What is messier than cement? Remember the time we had the plasterer I didn't get the house clean for a month? And digging up the new lot just after I worked like a slave to set it to rights! Charley, I just won't hear of it. You must be getting senile to want to start on a messy project like that. I suppose you'll want to have one of those tin flamingos wading in your pool."

Generally when I put my foot down Charley just sighs and gives in to what's right. This time he didn't say anything, just clamped his mouth shut in that stubborn disappointed way he has and went off. He hadn't given up the idea completely though because when I was straightening up his desk a few days later—and what a mess it was—I found some sketches for the pool. In each one the size of the pool kept getting bigger—first four feet, then six, then eight, and the number of bags of cement and sand he figured he'd need got higher and higher. I tore up the sketches and threw them away.

Charley brought up the subject just once more.

"About that pool, not only would it be kind of a pretty thing but the birds might come there to drink and we could get some of those bird-watching books and keep a list of the various kinds of birds we identified."

"Charley, you are getting senile. Birds! The dirtiest things there are except maybe dogs. And what do you want to be cluttering up the house with books for? I thought we agreed that when we sold your books before coming down here we weren't going to litter up the new place with a lot of dust-catching books."

Charley left me the next day.

I had driven over to the next town where I heard there was a

place you could stock up on cleaning supplies and get a good discount. I was held up coming home because I stopped to watch a demonstration of a new kind of floor waxer and I got into an argument with the man who was showing it.

When I pulled into the driveway I saw Charley at the back property line of the new lot, standing in a hole and shoveling dirt onto a big pile. The hole was already knee-deep. Charley was soaked with sweat and I could see that he probably had been working steadily ever since my back was turned. My neat, orderly lot that I worked on in the hot sun was being disfigured by that hole for Charley's pool.

I felt the return of my need to get things clean and orderly again. So I grabbed the shovel from Charley and just as he was about to explain I said: "Shut up. Get out of there and let me get this place cleaned up again."

I pitched into that pile of earth and threw it back into the hole and whacked it down good and hard because I didn't want an ugly mound of raw earth left over. I worked at top speed without paying any attention to how hot it was, the insects, or anything else and almost before I knew it I had that hole refilled, packed down hard and I even reseeded it. It wasn't as neat as before, a raw patch in the new grass, but it was orderly. I was so absorbed in what I was doing I didn't notice when Charley left.

When he didn't show up for dinner that evening I tried to call the marina where he hangs out sometimes but our phone wasn't working. I went to the next house up the street and asked to use the phone but they said it hadn't been working since the morning. Same story at the house beyond that one. Pretty fishy, I thought, that three houses in a row should all have their telephones out of order. They probably didn't want to let me see what sloppy housekeepers they were.

Charley hadn't returned by the time I went to bed. I went early because I was very tired from the strain of restoring order to the lot. When he hadn't come home by the next morning I was quite upset and drove down to report it to the county police, the phone still being out of order. They were helpful and asked like did he carry much money around with him, were any of his clothes missing, and did he have a girl friend (imagine, Charley!).

I answered "No" to all this and they said they would put out a "Missing Persons." They did but they never heard anything from it.

I must close because the lights go out in five minutes. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to everyone.

All the best,  
Frieda

P.S.: It seems Charley didn't run out on me after all. The telephone company tested out the buried cable that feeds our block and located a break where Charley had been putting in the pool. When they dug down to repair the cable, they found Charley. Someone had hit him with a shovel.

Nobody believed me when I said I didn't know anything about it. However, it's not so bad here as you might think. Everything is clean and orderly and already I've been put on a cleaning detail. Please write. The address is Florida State Prison, Tallacoola.



# **Stephen Barr**

## **The N-Plus-1th-Degree**

*It is a pleasure to welcome back Dr. Sylvan Moore, the oldest member of the Regent's Club, with one of his puzzling, provocative riddles-in-crime—and this one is perhaps the most ingenious murder problem Dr. Moore has ever posed in the smoking room of the Regent's.*

*Do you know a rhyme for the word "month"? There is one, you know...*

66 **T**hirty days hath September," young Hocking said, "April, May, and December." He looked jauntily pleased with himself, and glanced around the smoking room of the Regent's Club, where the conversation was taking place.

"Apart from your getting two of the months wrong," one of the new members, a lawyer, said, "it was obviously meant to rhyme with a particular month. That gives nine possibilities, because September, November, and December all rhyme, and January—"

"Now, don't tell me," interrupted Hocking, "that you agree with me and Walter Cronkite and say Feb-you-ary, too! The so-called correct pronunciation is ridiculous—"

"No, I'm only referring to the last two syllables; they have the same feminine rhyme, and—"

"I once sent him a rhyme about it," went on Hocking. "Trouble is, I sent it to station CBC by mistake, so he probably never got it. Want to hear it? The rhyme, I mean."

No one answered so he recited:

"What is so rare as a day in June?  
The student's eyes grew wary;  
Not to, he said, be picayune,  
A day in February!"

"It shows how unnatural the pronunciation really is, and it also has a perfectly legal split infinitive, because—"

"I'm afraid you're all wasting your time," interrupted our oldest

member,' Dr. Sylvan Moore. "You must be going by the old newspaper accounts. *The New York Times* had it more or less right, but you probably saw the *Daily Mirror*—very inventive."

"No, as a matter of fact I looked it up in old copies of the *Graphic* when I was in New York this spring," said the lawyer. "I gather it was the world's first 'tabloid,' as they call them there."

"I'm afraid you're wrong about that, too," Dr. Moore said. "The *New York Graphic* was started in imitation of our *Daily Mirror*, and, I might add, covered the news in a similar sensationalizing way. It was the old *World* that had the best report—I think *The Times* felt the story was too odd to be quite fit to print or at least to give the reasoning behind it. And the reasoning depended on the avoidance of cliché thinking. The whole case was a question of degree."

"Oh, I see what you mean," said a logician on the next sofa. "As opposed to a question of kind."

"No," said Dr. Moore. "It was a kind of degree—"

"Like Ph.D. and so," said the lawyer, and smiled. "Or do you mean something like the Third Degree?"

"Of course he doesn't," Hocking said. "He's referring to the n-plus-, or maybe it was the nth degree business. You see, she was explaining how much—"

"Who was?" asked another member.

"Why, the wife of the accused, of course. She was showing how certain she was that he was innocent. She said she believed in him that much."

"When people talk about the nth degree," said Dr. Moore, "they think it means as far as possible, but it doesn't necessarily. It means 'to a given degree,' and that leaves room for improvement. If we forget its mathematical implications, it can mean that we have an ace in the hole."

"Well she said it to show how much she believed in her husband, didn't she?" Hocking said.

"I suppose you mean that she used 'n-plus-1th' in that context," Dr. Moore said. "As it happened she used 'nth degree' to describe her belief in him. The other came later—and is the basis of the solution of the murder, so if you chaps will keep quiet for a bit, I'll tell you the story..."

(Editor's Note: *Confused? Baffled? Perplexed? Read on!*)

It was not only a matter of degree (Dr. Moore said), but a

matter of misunderstandings and cliché thinking. I was in New York at the time—May of 1926—and the English papers were too busy with the General Strike to pay much attention to an American murder case; and since the actors in this drama were not famous, and everything turned out as well as a murder-can, the papers resorted to mild quips—like the rhyme to “month,” which you appear to have misunderstood. What I would call a journalistic misunderstanding arises out of the expectation of cliché happenings.

For example, a very spectacular attempt at murder was once being described in front of a young reporter; a prominent public figure, they said, was to have been killed by switching the contents of a champagne bottle, and that was all he waited to hear. He dashed off and phoned in to his paper that Mr. So-and-So was to have been poisoned.

The actual truth was far more newsworthy: the famous person was not going to drink the champagne, but to christen a ship, and the substitute was nitroglycerine.

In the case of the rhyme to “month,” the point is that there isn’t supposed to be one. The wife of the accused—he was an absentminded mathematician—had complete faith in him; that is to say she *knew* he could never murder anyone, let alone plan it. According to the reporter on the *Graphic*, the polite lieutenant said she believed in him to the nth degree, and she replied, “No; to the n-plus-1th”—and there’s your rhyme to month. It wasn’t quite said that way, but anyhow, the *Graphic*’s reporter spotted it, and for some reason it went the rounds, with no credit to Dr. Whewell, the reputed originator.

What’s odd was that there *was* one of the oldest crime clichés involved, and no one noticed it. It first got into print in A. Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*: When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth. And when you believe something to the nth degree, anything that runs counter to it is impossible, and that was the advantage Janet Ford had over the extremely efficient New York Homicide Squad.

When I say Bill Ford was absentminded, I mean his powers of observation were subservient to his powers of concentration and if he went out in nonmatching socks it was because he’d worked out some terrific equation in his head, and socks didn’t matter. But he wouldn’t walk out into the middle of traffic. Janet knew this

and ran interference for him, as they say in American football. The murdered man, Brewster, was a recognized pest who had tried to date her. She was very attractive, and brought out the wolf in a lot of men, who mistook her look of interest and curiosity for a come-on.

Brewster was found shot in the head with a .32 bullet, and his own S&W revolver at the far end of the room. Same caliber, and the correct barrel scorings on the bullet. Janet was out apartment-hunting on the day of the murder and so was Bill; but being what he was, he was completely vague as to where he was and at what time, so he had no alibi. They had split up so as to cover more ground; they'd made two lists, but he didn't remember in which order he'd followed his, and he was one of those mouse-colored medium-height people who defy exact description.

There's an erroneous idea that doctors can fix the precise time of death by examining the body. The accuracy depends on various things—for example, temperature, which is unreliable on a spring day with the windows open, and anyway the body will be as cold as its surroundings twenty-four hours after death. Then chemical reactions, which vary in such a short time. About all they could say was that Brewster had eaten something an hour or so before death. As to time all they were sure of was sometime the day before.

Brewster had eaten something an hour or so before death. As to time, all they were sure of was sometime the day before.

Brewster lived in a hotel, and his body was discovered by the maid who summoned help without going to his suite. It is just possible to shoot oneself in the head, and with a final spasm throw the gun across the room; so it was a possible suicide, except that Brewster was not the type, and he was known to have many enemies. That kind of wolf usually has—as someone said at the Players Club, "All the world hates a lover."

Anyway, the police took Brewster's fingerprints, and they didn't match with the three found on the gun—a pearl-handled revolver quite common in those days. So it probably wasn't suicide—almost certainly, as he had no gloves on. It is, of course, possible to hold a gun with forefinger and thumb, the latter on the trigger, and leave no prints, since the mother-of-pearl was in the form of panels on the sides of the butt; but there was no reason for Brewster to have done that.

The police began asking around, and soon heard about

Brewster's latest attempted conquest—Janet. That led to Bill, and his fingerprints *did* match the ones found on the revolver. He said that (a) he never went near Brewster's hotel, (b) he had complete faith in Janet's statement that she despised Brewster, so he scarcely had a motive, and (c) he had never held that or any other firearm in his life. Janet believed him; the police, not unnaturally, did not. He was held for indictment, bail denied, and the police felt they had solved the case.

Janet was in an uproar; she demanded they go on with the investigation, and they reluctantly agreed. They questioned the renting agents or superintendents who might conceivably have given Bill Ford some sort of alibi but as the police lieutenant pointed out, it wasn't a case of alibi since none of the visits could be matched with the uncertain time of the murder, and Bill could have gone to the hotel at any of several intervals.

In any event, his prints were on the revolver butt, and he had denied having held it, or any gun. As Lieutenant Alfieri said, you can't transfer fingerprints, but Janet insisted it *must* have been done, because Bill was telling the truth.

New York is a big city but Greenwich Village—particularly in the '20's—was more like what it's called, and word of the murder got around even before the papers gave the news. The whole thing happened very quickly—Brewster was shot on Monday, the body was found early Tuesday morning, and Bill Ford was arrested Tuesday afternoon.

Janet somehow persuaded Alfieri to start checking alibis that same afternoon—he was a very perceptive policeman, and her intensity impressed him. It was something more than love. The trouble was that all the apartments on their lists were in Greenwich Village, and so was Brewsters' hotel—on West 8th Street, right around the corner from Macdougal Alley, where Bill admitted going to see an apartment; but being what he was, he had no idea that it contradicted his claim that he'd not been near the hotel.

The owner of the apartment was quite helpful, and was in fact the only one who could definitely give the time of Bill's visit. He'd given Bill the key and let him go up and look for himself. "He came in here about four on Monday," he said, "and as I was busy I said to go on up. He was there fifteen minutes at least, but he came down and said it was too big and they didn't want a studio anyway. I had to remind him to give me back my key."

So there it was; no alibi, strong circumstantial evidence—fingerprints—and a motive. Open and shut, Lieutenant Alfieri thought, but Janet mesmerized him.

"The motive is ridiculous," she said, "because he believed me when I said I hated Brewster, and besides, if he tells me he didn't do it, he didn't. As for the prints—something's wrong."

Alfieri tried, against his better judgment, to give an explanation of the prints, because he really wanted to believe her. "Perhaps somebody conned your husband into picking up the gun at some time," he suggested.

But Janet would have none of it. "Bill may be vague, but he knows a revolver when he sees one. He has an aversion to firearms, and he says he's never touched one, so he hasn't. He's too mathematical, or logical, to tell lies—he's too set on expressing truth, and he's not in the least vague about that, in spite of what the landlord thinks."

"Hm" said Alfieri, "that landlord's a rough type—he's not the kind to help people out; in fact, he knew all about the arrest and wouldn't blame Bill Ford if he *had* done it—Brewster being the type of Lothario he was."

I got into the case because Janet called me for advice. I'd met them at Oxford the year before, and Bill and I had discussed symbolic logic. Janet occasionally joined in—her comments were intuitional rather than dialectic, and brought us back to earth in a most clarifying way. I suppose it was logic that solved the case, but not police logic—Janet logic. And yet it was not that old cliché called woman's intuition. When you discuss something you have to start with *some* assumption, and hers was that Bill was telling the truth; so she eliminated what to her was the impossible, and what remained was that somehow the fingerprints had been faked.

But how? Of course you can make a cast in rubber of a man's fingertip and with it put his print on anything, but he'd be aware of it, unless he were in a drugged sleep. I said all that to Janet, and all she replied was, "When is a door not a door?"

Well, the answer to that old riddle is "When it's ajar." She was right in implying that we were faced with a riddle; what remained, no matter how improbable, must be the truth. But what, as has been said so many times, is, or was, the truth?

"It isn't like you to speak in riddles," I remarked.

"It's because I'm faced with, and thinking in, riddles. A riddle

wrapped in a mystery in an enigma,"—no, she couldn't have said that because Churchill didn't say it until the second World War. There I go doing the very thing she was trying to avoid! She was silent for a while, and then turned to me and said, "Let's go and look at the studio on Macdougal Alley."

"What on earth can you hope to find there?"

"We've got to begin somewhere. I've already asked Bill—Lieutenant Alfieri's a peach—he said I could see Bill as often as I want; and Bill was as vague as usual except that there were five rooms counting the studio—too big. Let's go as Mr. and Mrs. Moore, and you do the talking."

"What are we looking for?"

"A jar."

Well, I phoned the address on Macdougal Alley and a gruff voice said the studio was still vacant, and asked my name. I put on my strongest Savile Row accent and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Moore." As we left the hotel she went to the desk, and explained to me that she'd said she'd be back at six if anyone called. I had got the impression the desk clerk looked distressed, which was not too surprising since one of their guests was an accused murderer. On the way downtown I said, "I still don't understand what we're after—I can't see the logic in it."

"The logic," Janet replied, "lies in our remembering that the new truth is bound to be improbable. All we have to go on is that somehow fingerprints have been transferred—or if that, as you and Alfieri say, is truly impossible, then something else happened—some other transformation. I want to see the landlord and the studio apartment."

"But why not the other places that Bill visited?"

"Because he phoned for an appointment—it asked to in the ad—it was the only one that did."

The landlord looked like his voice—abrupt and domineering, and it showed in the face of his wife who stood beside him, and whom he introduced as "the missus." A willowy little blonde with nervous eyes and wearing what today would pass as a miniskirt—they were wearing them in 1926, although the flapper style had a very different effect—they were revolting against something quite different. I was rather surprised to notice that she seemed to be giving me the eye—and at the same time had a self-satisfied look as though I was responding, which I most certainly would not have been in the presence of her husband.

"Hope you don't mind stairs," he said. "It's five floors."

As we followed him up the stairs Janet muttered something. I turned and looked at her quizzically, and she smiled and whispered, "Now for the jar!" I mentally agreed—anything that would further our seemingly hopeless search would jar me—I could see no rhyme nor reason to it. How, I asked myself, could looking at an empty apartment tell us how a set of fingerprints had been transferred? Or how fingerprints had been taken on a mold without the awareness of the owner?

The top-floor apartment was quite big—two bedrooms looking south over the Alley and a dining room-kitchen, and to the north a very large studio with tilted skylight. The previous tenant had left no furniture, but the walls were painted buff, which was almost universal in the '20's in New York, and the woodwork was dark maroon.

The landlord opened the doors in turn, saying, "You get a real kitchen, and we pay the gas, every modern fixture, and a *reely* big studio for whoever's artistically inclined. Seventy-five per Garbage collected twice a week."

Janet looked around and said, "Yes—just as Bill said, no furniture."

The landlord stiffened and said, "Bill?" Then he blinked and said, "No, it's unfurnished like it says in the ad."

Janet turned to him. "Have you got a screwdriver?"

The landlord and I looked at her with equal astonishment, except that there was something more in his face.

"A what, lady?" he said. "And what would you need it for?"

"I just wanted to know, because you must have used one."

His eyes seemed to wabble. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "I never—"

He turned away and started hurrying down the stairs. We hurried after, and to my surprise Alfieri and two detectives met him at the office door.

"I want you to come to Homicide and answer some questions," the lieutenant said, and the landlord slumped the way bullies do when confronted by superior force. It turned out that Janet had asked her hotel desk clerk to phone Alfieri.

"The dilemma that I faced," Janet told me later, "was that Bill left his prints on the gun *without touching it*. Prints cannot be transferred, so the gun had been transformed in some way, but

how can one disguise a gun? As what? I thought about it until my head nearly split—and then I phoned Lieutenant Alfieri and he said, yes, the prints were only on the butt—on the handle.

"But what in heaven's name has a handle like a revolver? And mother-of-pearl at that. I thought of a dagger, with a bent handle, but that's a weapon, too, and Bill would have noticed.

"The kind of thing that people like Bill don't notice is the color of a sock. He'll put one on his left foot and then put on the left shoe, so by the time he's putting on the second sock he's forgotten the color of the first because it didn't matter to him in the first place. But how can you disguise a revolver butt? At first I thought, well, small things have small handles, but then it dawned on me that one very common, fairly large object has a small handle—a door.

"Bill never noticed that the handle to the studio door had mother-of-pearl panels on it—it's a lever handle, you see, and the landlord must have taken the panels off the revolver butt and screwed them on the door handle, and *his* prints were on the *inside* of the panels."

And that is precisely what he admitted to Alfieri. When she got through saying all this to him, the lieutenant said he'd be jiggered—and then, "Wait! Hold on, there! How did the landlord know to get the revolver panels on that door in time? I realize you believe in your husband, as you say, to the nth degree—but you've got it backwards!"

"No," said Janet. "Forwards. When Bill phoned and gave his name it must have clicked with the landlord—he'd heard about Brewster going after me, everyone in the Village had, and he'd been through it himself with that wiggly little wife of his—I saw her making eyes at you! So when Bill phoned; he said, "Okay, come at four"—it must have been around three when Bill phoned—and buzzed over to Brewster's and shot him; he took the revolver back to his place, transferred the panels to the door, then put the gun back in Brewster's room—no one notices comings and goings in that kind of crummy hotel—and then back again to his own place, just in time for Bill."

So the improbable happened—and Janet had gone to the n-plus-1th degree.

"Q"

# **Joyce Porter**

## **Dover Tangles with High Finance**

*Detective Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover, the sedentary Scotland Yard man (yes, Scotland Yard, although Dover is hardly the accepted or desirable image of that illustrious institution), has been called irascible, abusive, boorish, rude and crude—in fact, his book publisher openly refers to him as "abominable." Well, perhaps—only perhaps, mind you—Dover is mellowing. At most, you understand, only a trifle. He's almost as disagreeable, insulting, and unglamorous as he was; but we hasten to reassure you that he still snarls, shouts, grumbles, growls, scowls, snaps, and roars. But no matter how much you may dislike him, you'll have to admit he gets the job done in this case of a baffling murder—after his own fashion, as usual, but with credit to his noble profession . . .*

### **Detective: INSPECTOR WILFRED DOVER**

The directors of Sewell & Vallotton Company, Limited, together with the upper echelons of management, enjoyed a rare privilege in their London offices. They had their own private entrance hall and over the years a great deal of care and company money had been lavished on it. Delicate works of art and exquisite antiques were dotted about the vast expanse of the hall with a tastefulness which was always being photographed by the glossier monthly magazines. Whatever economies might be made elsewhere, nobody begrudged the extravagant luxuries here, and even the doormen had their uniforms made in Savile Row.

Not that the doorman on duty at the moment was looking particularly happy as he lurked behind an expensive sculpture by Henry Moore and waited for the next batch of policemen to arrive.

He brooded resentfully about the lot he already had upstairs, trampling round in their great boots and upsetting everything. He realized, of course, that when one of your directors gets himself

murdered in his own boardroom there's bound to be a bit of disturbance; but, the doorman reminded himself, there's moderation in all things. He'd been watching directors come and go for the last 25 years and he was blowed if he could see that one more or less made that much difference.

He looked at his watch. Half-past eleven! Blimey, how much longer were they going to be? You could walk it from Scotland Yard in ten minutes! He'd been hanging about here for nearly an hour already and had missed his coffee break in the bargain.

A big black car drew up in the private driveway. The doorman smoothed down his jacket and peered through the holes which Mr. Moore might have placed there for just such a purpose. Two of the occupants of the car appeared to be trying to extricate a third from the confines of the rear seat. The doorman sniffed contemptuously. Yes, well, if it hadn't been for the murder, that fat one coming out of the car like a tight cork out of a bottle wouldn't have got his foot over the threshold! What a lout! A filthy bowler hat and a disgusting old overcoat—not the sartorial standards you expected in the Sewell & Vallotton directors' private entrance hall!

The fat man was now laboring up the short flight of marble steps with a younger, thinner fellow chasing athletically after him. The doorman stood his ground. He'd long ago given up falling over himself to welcome anybody, never mind a couple of peasants like these.

The plate-glass doors, untouched by human hand, swung noiselessly open and the two new arrivals moved forward to receive a blast of warm scented air on the top of their heads.

Another step and—

"Strewth!" exploded Detective Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover.

There was a fastidious shiver from the glass in the chandelier but the attention of "Fattie of the Yard" was riveted on the floor. Eyes popping, he watched in astonishment as his boots sank up to the ankles in the thick pile of the carpet. For one who had spent his life wallowing in lower-middle-class squalor it was an intriguing, if unnerving, experience.

The younger, thinner man—Detective Sergeant MacGregor—went a bright pink as he always did when his superior made an exhibition of himself in public. The sergeant was just as impressed with the opulence of his surroundings as Dover was, but he would have died rather than show it.

The doorman adjusted his sneer and came forward, casually

skirting the five-foot-high T'ang vase and arriving just in time to stop the fat man getting his paws on a charming little Fabergé clock which was standing defenseless on one of Sheraton's finer tables.

"H'are you the—er—gentlemen from Scotland Yard?"

Poor Sergeant MacGregor was cut to the quick by the doorman's hesitation, but if you wanted to insult Dover you had to use a sledge-hammer. In any case Dover was far too busy gawping enviously round to pay much attention to the doorman. This lot must have cost somebody a pretty penny or he was a Dutchman! What about that picture? Looked as though it had been done by a two-year-old kid with its feet but they wouldn't have stuck it in a posh frame like that if it weren't valuable. And that dirty great mirror over there? Dover swung round suddenly on the doorman.

"Here—you got all this junk properly insured?"

That took the wind right out of the doorman's sails and without another word he led the two detectives over to the directors' own personal elevator, ushered them in, showed MacGregor which button to press, and thankfully watched them slowly disappear from sight.

The directors' own personal elevator was worth a king's ransom on its own account. The wrought-iron gates were Fifteenth Century Florentine work and the two carved clusters of fruit on the side walls had been confidently attributed to Grinling Gibbons; but it was the icon on the rear wall that caught Dover's eye. Not that Dover was exactly a connoisseur of early Novgorod religious painting but he found the gold and jewels with which this particular example was covered well-nigh irresistible.

"Do you reckon those rubies are real?" he demanded as the elevator wended its way gently upward.

"Oh, I should think so, sir," said MacGregor, noting with relief that the icon seemed to be securely bolted to the wall. "They wouldn't have any imitation stuff here."

Dover's hand was already moving towards his trouser pocket. "I'll bet you could prize 'em out easy as pie with a penknife," he observed as though challenging his sergeant to say that you couldn't.

But MacGregor was quick to scotch any bright ideas in that direction. "I don't advise you to try, sir. Sewell and Vallotton's collection of antiques is very well-known and you can be quite sure

they've taken all the necessary precautions against theft. I imagine this place is absolutely crawling with burglar alarms. Closed-circuit television cameras, too, I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh." Dover continued to stare wistfully at the rubies while MacGregor hoped fervently that Sewell & Vallotton had indeed got everything portable well nailed down. "I didn't know they were second-hand furniture dealers."

"Sir?"

"This dump. I thought it was some sort of an office building we were coming to."

"It is, sir. It's the head office of Sewell and Vallotton. You know"—MacGregor, who was more than a bit of a snob, looked down his nose—"they make soap."

"Soap?"

"Well, detergents now, I suppose, but they started off making soap. They're one of the biggest firms in that line in the country. Blanchett, Squishy-Washy, Alabas, Sparkle-Spume, Blua—they market all that and a dozen others besides."

"Well, what's all this stuff then?" Dover jerked an inquiring thumb at the icon.

MacGregor shrugged. "It's just their gimmick, sir. Some firms sponsor golf matches or horse shows; Sewell and Vallotton buy and display works of art. They make a specialty of saving national treasures from going abroad. It brings them millions of pounds' worth of free publicity and I suppose the antiques themselves are a pretty gilt-edged investment."

"Seems a funny way of going on," sniffed Dover.

"Sewell and Vallotton can more than afford to indulge their whimsies, sir."

Eventually the elevator reached the top floor, and Dover and MacGregor emerged to find themselves in what was known as the Directors' Suite. Here, too, money had been splashed around with a most liberal hand, as witness the fine Aubusson tapestry which covered the whole of the facing wall.

As MacGregor was closing the elevator gates they heard the creaking of regulation boots and a second later a young chubby-faced policeman came tiptoeing toward them, his cap tucked underneath his arm.

"Chief Inspector Dover, sir?" he inquired in a respectful whisper.

"Who are you?"

"Police Constable Saunderson, sir. C Division. Me and my mate answered the original 999 call and we've sort of been holding the fort ever since." In his innocence P.C. Saunderson considered himself entitled to administer a mild rebuke. "We thought you was never coming, sir."

Dover's face went black but MacGregor stepped in with a ready lie. "We were held up by the traffic," he explained quickly. "Now, what's going on here?"

"Well, nothing really at the moment, Sarge," replied P.C. Saunderson who was proving to be a rather complacent sort of lad. "I think you might say that me and my mate have got the situation well under control." He started to get his notebook out of his tunic pocket. "You've missed all the excitement—see?—what with you being held up by the traffic and everything. Now"—he flicked the pages of his notebook over—"me and Stokes—he's my mate—we got the 999 call relayed to us at ten seventeen precisely.

"A sudden death in suspicious circumstances was the message and we arrived downstairs at ten twenty-one. A nippy bit of driving that but, of course, the streets are pretty quiet round here in the middle of the morning. Or, at least, that's been my experience. Right—well, by ten twenty-three approximately we was up here and I conducted a preliminary examination of the deceased. Strictly between you and me, old Stokes is a bit of a dead loss when it comes to First Aid.

"Now, at ten twenty-five I turned to Stokes and said,"—P.C. Saunderson solemnly consulted his notebook—"I reckon this is a blooming murder, Jack, or"—he turned over a page—"or maybe he croaked hisself."

"For God's sake," snarled Dover, his feet giving him hell as usual, "do we have to stand here all day listening to this twaddle?"

P.C. Saunderson, whose romantic ideas about Scotland Yard's glamorous murder squad were about to take quite a beating, was disconcerted by the violence of the interruption. "Did you want to see the body, sir?" he stammered.

"Not likely!" came Dover's indignant retort. "If I'd wanted to spend my life looking at corpses I'd have joined a blooming mortuary! Isn't there somewhere we can go and sit down?"

"Oh, yes, sir! As a matter of fact I've already requisitioned the secretary's office for your use."

"And where's the secretary?" demanded MacGregor sharply, because somebody had to keep a check on these things.

"Having hysterics in the ladies' cloaks, I shouldn't wonder," chuckled P.C. Saunderson as he led the way down a corridor devoted exclusively to masters of the Seventeenth Century Dutch school. "Funny how it takes some people, isn't it?"

"Good God, man!" shouted MacGregor. "You don't mean to say you've let her out of your—"

"Now, now, Sarge," said P.C. Saunderson soothingly, "give us credit for a bit of the old common or garden. She's in the clear. Never went in the boardroom after the bottle of sherry was opened. Everybody agrees about that. And she didn't have any contact with the suspects after the old fellow snuffed it either, so she can't be an accomplice. Ah"—he opened a door—"here we are! Think you can pig it in here?"

The secretary's room was startlingly elegant but the furnishings were merely expensive and not priceless. Dover didn't care. He homed to a comfortable-looking chair behind the desk and flopped into it with a sigh of relief. MacGregor propped himself up against a filing cabinet and got his own notebook out. P.C. Saunderson decided not to push his luck and remained standing by the door.

"Sherry?" prompted Dover, ever hopeful.

The constable twinkled roguishly at him. "The murder weapon, sir."

"The murder weapon? Do you mean the victim was hit over the head with a bottle?"

"Oh, no, sir." It was P.C. Saunderson's turn to register surprise. "He was poisoned. Didn't they tell you?"

"Nobody ever tells me anything," grumbled Dover, with considerable justification. "And that goes for you too, laddie, so you can wipe that stupid grin off your face! I don't know what you young coppers are coming to, straight I don't! Why, when I was your age I'd have had the bloomin' case solved by now."

"Give us another half hour, sir, and I'll have it all tied up for you," responded P.C. Saunderson eagerly and watched with some trepidation as Dover's usually pasty face turned dark crimson.

The trouble with Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover was that he had a rather dog-in-the-manger attitude to work. He didn't want to do it himself, but he got exceedingly nasty if anybody else tried, too obviously, to relieve him of the burden. MacGregor, who had more

experience than anybody else in the delicate art of handling the old fool, stepped in once more to smooth things over.

"Just give us the facts, Constable," he said, "and leave the detective work to us."

And, sulkily hoping that everybody realized how hurt his feelings were, P.C. Saunderson did just that.

The crime had occurred just as the monthly board meeting of the Sewell & Vallotton directors was about to start. Only five directors had been present and they had eventually divided themselves up neatly into one victim and four suspects.

"And the name of the dead man?" asked MacGregor.

"Sir Holman Hobart." P.C. Saunderson dutifully waited while MacGregor wrote it down. "He was chairman of the Board. Chap in his early sixties, I should think."

MacGregor nodded and the story continued.

The five directors had all arrived for their meeting at about ten o'clock. According to Mrs. Doris Vick, the secretary who had welcomed them and taken their hats and coats, they had behaved quite normally and gone straight into the boardroom. When everybody had arrived she had closed the door and left them to their weighty deliberations.

MacGregor looked up. "That's a bit odd, isn't it? Doesn't the secretary usually sit with the Board and take down the minutes or something?"

"I believe that is the accepted procedure, Sarge, but from what I've been able to ascertain that lot in there"—P.C. Saunderson inclined his head toward the beautifully inlaid double doors in the wall directly opposite the secretary's desk—"are a bit of a law unto themselves." The constable lowered his voice. "Seems they prefer to have all their argy-bargies in private and *then* call Mrs. Vick in and dictate an expurgated version of what happened. She says they're real gentlemen and they don't like cussing and swearing in front of a lady."

"What the hell," demanded Dover, temporarily abandoning his search for some decent writing paper that wasn't defaced by Sewell & Vallotton's engraved letterhead, "are you whispering for?"

"Well," said P.C. Saunderson defensively, "we don't want them to hear us talking about them, do we, sir?"

"No skin off my nose," grunted Dover and opened another drawer.

MacGregor, however, was blessed with a more inquiring mind. He pointed his pencil at the double doors. "That's the boardroom, is it?"

"Right, Sarge."

"And the dead body?"

"Oh, that's in there too, Sarge." P.C. Saunderson drew himself up proudly. "The doc wanted to take it away with him but I said no, not until you'd had a chance to look at it."

"The police surgeon's been and gone?" asked MacGregor, shooting an anxious glance at Dover.

"Said he couldn't hang about any longer, Sarge. Still, I made him give me his preliminary report. He can't tell us anything more until he's done the post-mortem."

"But I don't get this," persisted MacGregor. "You mean that all the surviving members of the Board are sitting in there with the corpse?"

"It's nicely covered up with a sheet, Sarge, and they insisted. Of course, I've got my mate, Stokes, in there too, keeping an eye on them. I told you they was a queer lot, didn't I? Not one of 'em has so much as set foot outside that room since the old boy dropped down dead."

MacGregor took a deep breath to steady himself. "Yes, well, let's get back to that, shall we? You can explain these peculiar goings on when we come to them. Now, we'd got as far as the five of them having their board meeting."

But P.C. Saunderson was a stickler for accuracy. The board meeting, he ponderously pointed out, had not actually started. There was, it seems, a rather charming tradition at Sewell & Val-loton according to which the directors, before settling down to their meeting, refreshed themselves with a glass or two of choice sherry. Poured, added the constable, looking meaningfully at MacGregor, from an unopened bottle.

Dover, who had been quietly resting his eyes, opened them and smacked his lips.

"You're sure of that?" asked MacGregor.

"Quite sure, Sarge. I got it from that commissionaire chap downstairs. It's his job to supply two bottles of sherry for each board meeting. Anything the directors don't consume is his perks. He bought the bottles on his way to work this morning from an off-license in Pewter Street and he'll take his oath that they hadn't been tampered with when he left 'em on the table in the

boardroom. Anyhow, we don't need to worry too much about what happened to the sherry at this stage. If the poison had been put in the bottle, the whole lot of 'em would have died, wouldn't they?"

MacGregor chewed the end of his pencil and admitted somewhat helplessly that this would appear to be so.

P.C. Saunderson looked pleased; then, sucking in his second wind, he continued inexorably. One of the directors, the Marquis of Arnfield, had opened the sherry and poured it out, but the tray of glasses had been handed round by another director, the Honorable Gisbert FittsArthur. Presumably either nobleman could have surreptitiously slipped in the fatal dose, but it was a little difficult to see how they could have insured that Sir Holman took the right glass. As Chairman he had been served first out of courtesy and had had the choice of five more or less identical goblets.

"You can hold a tray so that a man will probably take a particular glass," MacGregor pointed out doubtfully. "Still, it's pretty risky. What happened next?"

Nothing, really. The directors had stood around, sipping their drinks and chatting. After about ten minutes Sir Holman had called them to order and suggested that they might as well make a start. Everybody was just beginning to sit down when Sir Holman, standing at the head of the table, had gasped, clutched his throat, choked, retched, doubled up in obvious agony, and dropped down dead.

"And the funny thing is, Sarge," P.C. Saunderson went on with a wondering shake of the head, "that none of 'em seems to have doubted for a minute that he'd been poisoned. And not accidental, neither. They spotted straight off that they'd all be under suspicion, so they called the secretary on the intercom and told her to get the police. After that they just sat tight, watching each other. Until me and Stokes arrived nobody was allowed to enter or leave the boardroom. What do you think of that, eh?"

MacGregor shrugged.

"If you ask me, Sarge, it's a conspiracy."

"Well, nobody is asking you, laddie, so shut up!" Dover, having delivered himself of this pleasantry, crooked a finger at his sergeant. MacGregor hurried over to the desk. "Sling him out!" Dover ordered.

"Sir?"

"You heard me! Cocky young smart aleck—get rid of him!"

P.C. Saunderson might have had his faults but being stone-deaf

wasn't one of them. "I haven't quite finished my report yet, sir," he said and went so far as to produce a friendly man-to-man smile.

Dover's habitual scowl deepened. "You were finished ten minutes ago, laddie," he growled ominously. "Take my word for it."

MacGregor moved in smartly before the situation could degenerate any further. He caught the constable by the arm and began to lead him over to the door. "Well, come on!" he urged impatiently. "What else is there? And for God's sake keep it short!"

"It's just that me and Stokes searched all the suspects, Sarge." "And?"

"I thought that whoever brought the poison into the room must have carried it in something—see?—and they might still have the container on their person."

MacGregor gave the arm he was grasping a warning shake. "Did you find anything?"

"Well, not exactly. I haven't had time, have I? But I confiscated everything they had in their pockets. I've got all the stuff locked up in that filing cabinet and I'd just finished making a list when you arrived." P.C. Saunderson risked a sideways glance in the direction of the desk. "I hope I did the right thing."

MacGregor opened the door with one hand and held out the other. "Give me the key. Now"—he dropped his voice and spoke more kindly—"take my advice and stay out of sight for a bit. No, better still, see if you can't rustle up some coffee for him, and a few biscuits. He's generally a bit more amenable when he's been fed."

With the door open and escape in sight, P.C. Saunderson threw the discipline of years to the winds. "What's his favorite food, Sarge?" he demanded in an aggrieved whisper. "Babies?"

Dover watched in gloomy silence as MacGregor unlocked the filing cabinet and brought out five small cardboard boxes, all neatly labeled with names. It was only when the boxes had been deposited on the desk in front of him and he caught sight of the contents that he sat up and began to take notice.

"Blimey!" he squealed. "Get an eyeful of all that!"

"Oh, sir, I don't think—"

MacGregor was too late. Chief Inspector Dover had already got at the loot and was dribbling gold watches, silver cigar cutters, platinum ballpoint pens, and plump soft leather wallets through

the stickiest fingers in the Metropolitan Police. MacGregor scrabbled desperately, trying to return each avidly snatched-up goodie to its own box.

"Who are they, for God's sake?" gasped Dover, flicking away unsuccessfully at a diamond-studded lighter before abandoning it for another in opalescent strawberry enamel. "Bleeding millionaires?"

MacGregor caught the diamond-studded lighter just before it hit the desk. "As near as makes no difference, I believe, sir. Now, which box did this come from? Oh, sir, please, we shall get them all muddled up and—"

"It's downright unfair!" whined Dover, grabbing for an alligator-skin wallet. "Nobody ought to be this rich! 'Strewh, look at this!" He opened the wallet to reveal a thick wad of five-pound notes. "I'll bet he doesn't even know how much he's bleeding well got!"

"He may not, sir," said MacGregor, literally pulling the wallet out of Dover's stubby fingers, "but P.C. Saunderson certainly does. He's made a complete inventory of everything."

"He would!" Dover looked around for a consolation prize. A heavy gold cigarette case caught his eye and by the time MacGregor had returned the wallet to its box Dover was already lighting a fat white cigarette with the enameled lighter.

"Oh, sir!" said MacGregor.

Dover ignored the reproach and went through the routine of hacking, coughing, and spluttering which, more often than not, accompanied his first puff.

"Don't you think we'd better start questioning the people concerned, sir? They must be getting very impatient at having to wait so long."

Dover mopped his eyes and regarded his purloined cigarette with disgust. "Talk about sweaty socks!" he observed disparagingly. "What did you say? Oh, I suppose we might as well. Wheel the first one in."

In some bewilderment MacGregor examined the names, titles, and decorations which P.C. Saunderson had painstakingly written on the little boxes. How was one with only a scanty acquaintance of the beau monde to sort out the precedence in this bunch? Of course Sir Holman Hobart Bt., K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., M.C. (the deceased), could be ignored; but that still left the Marquis of Arnfield, M.V.O., M.B.E., T.D.; Dr. Benjamin Zlatt, O.B.B., Q.C.,

M.Sc., LL.D., F.R.I.C.; Vice-Admiral T. R. Jonkett-Brown, C.B.E., D.S.O., D.S.C., R.N. (ret); and the Honorable Gisbert FittsArthur, B.A., F.R.G.S.

"Alphabetical order!" grunted Dover, cutting the Gordian knot.

As a matter of fact, almost any sequence would have served, as there was a remarkable similarity in the appearance of the surviving Sewell & Vallotton directors. Dover, indeed, never really did get round to telling t'other from which. It was almost as if all four of them had been cast from the same mold and only as an afterthought had a few superficial details been added to distinguish one from the other. Each was vaguely middle-aged, aggressively well-nourished, beautifully groomed and suited by a tailor who knew, where necessary, how to conceal an incipient paunch.

The Marquis of Arnfield, as befitted a peer of the realm, played it very aloof and distant. He waited with only the merest hint of impatience as MacGregor placed a chair for him in front of the desk.

Dover was busy examining a packet of picture postcards which he had found tucked away in Admiral Jonkett-Brown's possessions, but the Marquis appeared not to notice the snickers and grins which ensued. He had condescended to make a statement to the police but that was going to be the limit of his social contact with them.

"I think I should say right at the beginning," drawled the Marquis, gazing at a delightful little Gainsborough which hung on the wall over Dover's right shoulder, "that I did not murder Sir Holman Hobart."

"Disgusting!" chuckled Dover under his breath. "They bloomin' well want running in for having muck like—oh, crikey!" And then, just to show that his mind really was on his work, he swung round suddenly on the Marquis. "You seem damned sure it's murder."

"Accident would appear to be extremely unlikely and Sir Holman was the last man in the world to commit suicide, especially in public."

"Might have been a heart attack or something," said Dover, wondering why he hadn't thought of that lovely labor-saving idea before.

The Marquis continued to feast his eyes on the Gainsborough. Most people, finding themselves face to face with Dover, would

have done the same. "Your police doctor didn't think so."

Dover sighed and shuffled through his picture postcards. "Who are you putting your money on?"

The Marquis didn't bother pretending not to understand. "I'm afraid I haven't the faintest idea. They say poison is a woman's weapon, don't they? Perhaps you ought to arrest our faithful Mrs. Vick."

"The secretary? But I thought she—"

The Marquis deigned to look straight at Dover. "I was being facetious," he murmured. "But, since we are on the subject of poisoning, perhaps I ought to mention that Dr. Zlatt is a qualified chemist."

"Is he now?" said Dover, pushing the picture postcards to one side.

"And a very distinguished one. Sewell and Vallotton often employ him as a consultant and so do several other firms. He must have unrestricted access to a number of industrial research laboratories."

"Fancy." Dover looked up hopefully. "You didn't happen to see him slipping anything in Sir What's-his-name's drink?"

The Marquis squinted down his nose. "Of course not."

Dover sighed again and dragged some sheets of typing paper over in front of him. "You'd better tell us what happened in there, I suppose," he grumbled and began hunting through the boxes in front of him. Eventually he selected an old-fashioned fountain pen belonging to the Honorable Gisbert FittsArthur and unscrewed the top. "You're the one who poured the sherry, aren't you?"

"Yes. I always do. I filled the five glasses on the tray, took my own, then old Gissie FittsArthur handed the others round. He loves appearing generous when somebody else is footing the bill."

There was a strong rumor circulating round Scotland Yard that Chief Inspector Wilfred Dover couldn't even write his own name. Judging from the way he was futilely scratching with the borrowed fountain pen, the rumor was probably true. MacGregor watched him jabbing the nib irritably into the paper and decided that he had better carry on with the questioning until Dover had less important problems on his mind.

"Did you speak to Sir Holman, sir, after you poured out the sherry and before he died?"

The Marquis acknowledged MacGregor's presence by a languid

quarter turn of his head. "Naturally. I went over to have a word with him as soon as I'd finished pouring the sherry. I suppose we stood chatting over by the window for several minutes."

By judicious use of his teeth Dover managed to restore the fourteen-carat gold nib to something approaching its original condition. MacGregor hurried on with his next question.

"What happened after that, sir?"

The Marquis withdrew a fine linen handkerchief from his cuff and waved it negligently across his nose. The scent of lavender filled the air. "After that? Well, Sir Holman was called away by Dr. Zlatt. Zlatt had a great sheaf of papers in his hand and the pair of them stood looking at them. I joined Gissie Fittsarthur and the Admiral by the sherry table. Gissie was knocking back as much free drink as he could get his hands on, of course. Then Sir Holman started walking to the head of the table to call the meeting to order and Admiral Jonkett-Brown muttered something about wanting a quick word with him. He caught him about halfway up the table and they had a brief chat. After that Sir Holman suggested that we should all take our seats."

Dover chucked the fountain pen back in its box and scowled disagreeably at the Marquis of Arnfield. "So the whole bang shoot of you talked to Sir What's-his-name while he was guzzling his sherry?"

An expression of acute distaste passed over the Marquis' countenance. "Not exactly. Gissie Fittsarthur didn't speak to him, as far as I can remember."

Dover grunted and returned to an examination of the little boxes.

The Marquis wafted his handkerchief over his face again. "Is that all?" he asked MacGregor faintly.

"Well, just another question or two, if you don't mind, sir." MacGregor cringed visibly as Dover emerged triumphant with a carved ivory toothpick. "When Sir Holman left you to go and talk to Dr. Zlatt, can you remember how much sherry he still had left in his glass."

"Yes."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

The Marquis closed his eyes in a slow blink of martyrdom. "I said, yes, I do remember how much sherry he still had in his glass. He had it all left."

"All, sir?"

The Marquis directed a bleak stare at MacGregor. "Are you having difficulty in hearing me, my good man?"

MacGregor blushed. "No, sir."

"I am glad to hear it. I rather pride myself on the clarity of my enunciation. Now, as I was saying, when Sir Holman left me to talk to Zlatt he hadn't touched his sherry. There was nothing unusual about this. Sir Holman was a whiskey man and didn't care much for sherry. However, it is the tradition at Sewell and Vallotton to serve sherry before each board meeting, so there was nothing Sir Holman could do about it. He just used to carry his glass around until he was ready to open the meeting. Then he went to the head of the table, tossed the whole glassful down at one go, and called us to order. Like," added the Marquis with a very aristocratic sneer, "someone drinking cough mixture."

"That's very interesting, sir," said MacGregor and shot a glance at Dover to see if this vital piece of information had penetrated the solid ivory. Was there a momentary hesitation in the delicate exploration, with the borrowed toothpick, of the Chief Inspector's left ear? It was difficult to tell. MacGregor turned back to the Marquis. "I suppose everybody in the boardroom knew that Sir Holman usually drank his sherry like that?"

"Of course." The Marquis flourished his handkerchief with studied grace. "It was no secret. He did it for years."

MacGregor tried to hide his excitement. "No doubt that's why he never noticed the poison."

"No doubt. Is there anything else?"

"Er—just one more point, sir." MacGregor turned back a page or two in his notebook. "Ah, yes. Could you tell me what you and Sir Holman were talking about, sir?"

The Marquis looked annoyed. "I fail to see what damned business it is of yours," he snapped, "but, if you must know, we were discussing my re-election to the board. I am due to retire in a couple of months under our rules and I wanted to be quite sure that our chairman knew that I was intending to stand again."

"There was no quarrel or disagreement, sir?"

"None. Sir Holman assured me of his full support." The Marquis stood up and glared icily at Dover who was now engaged in trying to get the top off the Marquis' own pocket flask. "No doubt you will be returning my personal possessions in due course. I would prefer to have them in an undamaged condition, if that is possible..."

The Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur was a watery-eyed, shriveled old chap who was clearly keen to get on pally terms with two real-life detectives.

"Always been a great one for mystery stories," he confided as he hitched his chair nearer to the desk. "Started as a nipper with those Sherlock Holmes ones and never looked back since, hm? Borrow 'em from the library, don't you know. Can't afford to buy books with surtax the rate it is. So—you've me to thank that there was no tampering with the evidence in there, hm? Knew there was something pretty fishy about the way old Holman keeled over. Fit as a fiddle, he was. 'Don't touch anything!' I told 'em. 'And nobody's to leave the room, either!' I knew exactly what to do, hm?"

Dover scowled resentfully and pulled the Honorable Gisbert's box in front of him. The old-fashioned fountain pen, a rather shabby wallet, four pieces of string, three bus tickets, a large sheet of hastily folded blotting paper—the Honorable Gisbert's personal possessions were not up to the high standards Dover had come to expect. He opened up the sheet of blotting paper and glowered at its virgin whiteness.

The Honorable Gisbert grinned sheepishly. "Always stock up on a bit of stationery, hm? Well, Sewell and Vallotton won't miss it, will they?"

Dover pushed the box away and got down to business. "You were the one who handed the sherry round?"

"Ah! Yes, well, I can explain that. Innocent as a newborn babe, hm? Sherry glasses all laid out on a heavy silver tray. Lord Arnfield pours the sherry out. I pick up the tray. Both hands, see? Takes both my hands to lift the damned thing. Couldn't possibly have held it in one hand while I popped the poison in. Besides, how did I know which glass poor Holman was going to take?"

"You served him first," Dover pointed out through an enormous yawn.

"Who told you that? Oh, Arnfield, of course! Well, if it's a suspect you're after, have a good look at our noble Marquis, hm? *Cui bono*, that's what I always say."

MacGregor knew it was no use waiting for Dover to respond to a Latin phrase, however well-known. "Are you suggesting that the Marquis of Arnfield benefits from Sir Holman's death?" he asked.

The Honorable Gisbert bared his yellow teeth in what could

have been a smile. "Five thousand a year. What I'd call a substantial motive, hm?"

"He stands to inherit that, sir?"

"No, not inherit! Keep. That's what he gets for serving on the board, don't you know. Arnfield's term of office coming to an end. No re-election for him without poor Holman's backing. Ergo, five thousand a year gone up the spout and Arnfield's got some very expensive hobbies to keep up."

"And Sir Holman was not going to support him, sir?"

The Honorable Gisbert winked, tapped the side of his nose, and leered knowingly. "Little bird!" he sniggered. "Little bird, hm? Holman wanted the seat for his nephew. Everybody knows that."

"You accusing this Marquis of Who's-your-father of murder?" demanded Dover who could occasionally get to the point with amazing speed.

The Honorable Gisbert squirmed uncomfortably. "Hey, steady on!" he whinnied. "Arnfield and I belong to the same club. Not that I'll be able to keep my dues up much longer with the way—"

"Well, who do you fancy then?" demanded Dover.

"I'd give you six to four on Zlatt," responded the Honorable Gisbert maliciously. "Well, you can't call-poisoning an Englishman's crime, can you?"

Dover had found himself an ebony comb in a chased silver case. "That all you've got to go on? That Zlatt's not an Englishman?"

"No. He's got a motive, too."

"So has this Marquis fellow."

"Zlatt's is-bigger," said the Honorable Gisbert. "*Cui bono*—told you that before." He paused in wonder as Dover slowly drew the comb through his meager tufts of hair. "I say, that's a bit unhygienic, isn't it?"

"Why?" asked Dover, continuing his combing unperturbed. "Zlatt's not got dandruff, has he?"

"That's Zlatt's comb?"

"In his box," said Dover, idly running his thumbnail along the teeth.

The Honorable Gisbert whickered like a senile horse. "Bald as a coot!" he tittered. "What's he want a comb for?"

"Maybe it's a reminder of happier days," chuckled Dover and warmed to the Honorable Gisbert as this shaft of wit was greeted by flattering guffaws.

MacGregor, who had lost his sense of humor the day after he was appointed Dover's assistant, cleared his throat. "You were telling us about Dr. Zlatt's motive, sir."

"Ah!" The Honorable Gisbert pulled himself together. "Next chairman of Sewell and Vallotton. No doubt about it. Ten thousand a year plus perks." The yellow teeth were revealed once more. "Might be tempted to commit murder myself for that, hm? And he had the opportunity. While he was showing poor Holman those papers. Quickness of the hand, hm? Juggling about like that he could easily have dropped something in Holman's sherry."

Police Constable Saunderson brought in the coffee.

Dover welcomed the refreshments with his usual charm and grace. "Coffee? 'Strewth, it's a square meal I want, laddie!" He grabbed the stickiest-looking cake. "This muck wouldn't keep a fly going."

"Maybe I can get you some sandwiches, sir," said P.C. Saunderson as another cake plunged down the Chief Inspector's gullet.

"Sandwiches? With my stomach, laddie?" Dover shook his head and his face assumed a suitably solemn expression. "I've got to be careful, I have. Doctor's orders. I've got a very delicate stomach, you see, and—"

But MacGregor had no intention of letting Dover get started on the subject of his stomach. "I do think, sir, that we ought to finish off these interviews before lunch. We've kept these people waiting long enough already and they are pretty important men, you know. We don't want them to be making complaints."

"Let 'em try!" blustered Dover with the bravado of one who'd had more complaints made against him than most of us have had hot dinners. "We're dealing with murder, not some bloomin' parking violation."

"That's what makes speed in the initial stages so important, isn't it, sir?"

Dover, after a pause for thought, decided that MacGregor hadn't the guts to try being cheeky. He helped himself to another cake.

"Er—have you got any theories yet, sir?"

Dover wiped a blob of cream off his lapel and slowly licked his finger. "Didn't care much for the look of that Marquis fellow," he admitted grudgingly. "Or the other one, come to that."

"The Honorable Gisbert, sir? No, he wasn't very impressive, was he? This Dr. Zlatt looks as though he might be a good possi-

bility." Dover nodded, his mouth full again.

"Actually, sir"—MacGregor broached the subject with considerable care because Dover had a habit of reacting unfavorably to other people's ideas—"I was wondering about the Marquis of Arnfield myself. It's this business of Sir Holman not liking sherry, you see. Now, presented with a tray of glasses, wouldn't he be likely to take the one that was *least* full? The Marquis could have poisoned one glass and then only half filled it—"

"You don't have to spell it out in words of one syllable!" snapped Dover, indicating that he was ready for his second cup of coffee by shoving the saucer noisily across the desk.

"It was just a suggestion, sir."

"And a damned stupid one!" snarled Dover as he stuffed the last cake in his mouth. "Anyhow, I thought of it myself hours ago."

"Yes, sir," sighed MacGregor.

Dover dropped six lumps of sugar in his cup and started stirring it with a silver swizzle stick that he'd come across in the Marquis of Arnfield's box. The gentle exercise appeared to give him pleasure and for some minutes he swizzled away. MacGregor and P.C. Saunderson stood in bemused silence until the Chief Inspector at last raised his head. "Well, what are you waiting for? Bring the next one in!"

Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown had bright blue mariner's eyes, a red face, and a nasty temper. In spite of this he very nearly became Dover's friend for life when he stormed in declaring that he would make no statement and answer no questions without the professional advice of his solicitor.

"Very wise!" approved Dover, most of whose attention was currently devoted to thumbing through a little address book he'd found. "Pity there aren't a few more like you. Get the next one, MacGregor!"

The Admiral was a little taken aback. "It's not that I want to obstruct your inquiries," he explained awkwardly.

"Of course not," agreed Dover, delicately moistening a finger before he turned over the next page.

"But you must admit we've all been placed in a deuced sticky position."

Dover's face was beginning to ache with the effort of sustaining an encouraging smile. "You can't be too careful," he mumbled.

"Not that I've anything to hide," the Admiral went on. "Damn it, I only exchanged a couple of words with Holman before he

went down as though he'd been felled with a marlinespike." Without thinking he sat down in the chair and the last traces of benevolence faded from Dover's countenance. "So, you see, I couldn't have killed him, even if I'd wanted to. Poor old devil! what a rotten way to go, eh? Still, one of us four must have done it. There's no getting away from that. Well, luckily I'm not the sort of man who flinches in the face of unpleasant facts. Now, let's have a look at the rest of the field, shall we? What about the Marquis of Arnfield for a start? I daresay you've formed a few opinions of your own about him but I'd just like you to listen to a little theory of mine."

Dover reached for a watch from the Honorable Gisbert's box, wound it up, and placed it ostentatiously on the desk.

The Admiral beamed. "Good! I'm glad to see you're a man after my own heart. Be brief and keep to the point—that's what I used to tell my young officers. I can't tolerate chaps who ramble on and on without ever saying anything. I've been accused of being a trifle too blunt in my time, but nobody's ever called me a shilly-shallier. Thirty years in the Navy's taught me a thing or two—and keeping my eyes open is one of them. And using the old brain. I haven't been wasting my time sitting out there, you know. I've been thinking and in my opinion the Marquis of Arnfield might well be your man. And I can give you a lead as to how he did it, too."

To Dover's patent dismay the Admiral settled back comfortably in his chair and crossed one immaculately trousered leg over the other. "As soon as he'd poured out the sherry, Arnfield dashed across the room and caught poor Holman over by the window. They were talking together for quite a while, discussing Arnfield's chances of being re-elected to the board, I shouldn't wonder. Still, that doesn't matter at the moment. What does matter is that Arnfield is congenitally incapable of speaking to any of us members of the lower orders without waving that damned handkerchief of his about like a distress signal. You must have noticed him. It's a damned dirty habit, if you ask me, and dashed distracting, too. With that flapping about in your face you could have a ton of bricks dropped in your sherry and never even notice."

MacGregor caught Dover's eye and correctly interpreted the finger being drawn grimly across the Chief Inspector's throat as an indication that somebody's patience was becoming exhausted. Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown, however, was not a man who let

himself be interrupted lightly and MacGregor's half-hearted attempts were sunk without a qualm.

"Mind you, the Marquis of Arnfield isn't the only one you ought to be keeping your eye on. There's our Herr Doktor Zlatt, too. I've always thought he was a deuced sight too clever by half. Ambitious, you know. Sort of blighter who'd stop at nothing. Well, now"—the Admiral uncrossed his legs and glanced expectantly up at Dover—"there's a couple of pointers for you to follow up."

Dover's eyes had been closed for some time and they didn't open.

The Admiral, his ears already beginning to steam a little, turned brusquely to MacGregor in search of enlightenment. "The fellow's not gone to sleep, has he?" he demanded.

"Of course not, sir!" MacGregor's attempt to pass off a tricky situation with a gay laugh was not helped by the faint bubbling sound which started to come from Dover's lips. "Er—what about the Honorable Gisbert Fittsarthur, sir?"

"He happens to be a very old friend of mine," said the Admiral coldly, as though that settled the matter.

"But that doesn't mean that he isn't capable of murder."

"It makes it dashed unlikely!"

"He did hand the sherry round, sir."

"True." The Admiral pursed his lips. "But we were all watching him very closely. He dropped the tray last month. He's beginning to show his age, you know. Getting doddery and more than a bit potty, too. He's got this bee in his bonnet about how poor he is. Well"—the Admiral's red face creased in a frown as he tried to be fair—"I don't suppose he's worth a penny more than half a million these days but that's no excuse for some of the things he does. I mean, we've all got to tighten our belts a bit but there's no need to go writing your letters on the blank pages torn out of library books, is there?"

"I suppose not, sir," said MacGregor.

"And the way he goes on at these board meetings! It's a positive disgrace for a fellow of his breeding. Filling his fountain pen out of the chairman's inkwell, purloining pencils and sheets of paper, downing as much free sherry as he can get his hands on! I've warned him about it. 'Never you mind about finishing up in a pauper's grave,' I told him. 'It's the loony bin you're heading for.' I might as well have saved my breath because he went through the whole rigmarole just the same this morning. Jolly poor show, you know, with people like Zlatt looking on. Gives 'em an entirely

false impression of British aristocracy."

By the time Dr. Benjamin Zlatt settled himself with bland composure in the suspects' chair, Dover had had more than enough. His stomach was rumbling like a jumbo jet at takeoff. Dr. Zlatt suddenly found himself at the tail end of Dover's fury.

"I'm thinking of charging you with murder!" snarled Dover.

Dr. Zlatt didn't turn a hair. "In that case, my dear sir, I can only advise you to think again."

"You have access to poison!" roared Dover, determined now to make somebody pay for all the trouble he was being put to. "You'll be the next chairman of this bloomin' board and you could have slipped the poison into Sir What's-his-name's sherry when you were showing him those papers."

"Ah!" Dr. Zlatt nodded his head wisely. "Means, motive, and opportunity! Luckily I can demolish your hypothesis without much difficulty."

"Oh, can you? Well, take it from me, mate, if there's any demolishing to be done round here I'll do it!" Dover, suiting his actions to his words, raised his fists and clenched them threateningly. It would have been more impressive if they hadn't looked like a couple of rather dirty, pink, overstuffed cushions.

Dr. Zlatt merely smiled. "May I be permitted to deal with your accusations one at a time? First, the question of the poison. I agree—nobody in that boardroom could have got hold of whatever poison may have been used more easily than I. But, please, give me credit for some intelligence. Should I ever contemplate committing murder, poison is the last means I should choose. It would point the finger of suspicion at me immediately."

"It's the old double bluff," said Dover. "You used poison because you thought I'd think you'd be too clever to use poison."

There were thirty seconds of respectful silence while everybody, including Dover, dissected the cunning logic of this statement.

"And then," Dr. Zlatt continued calmly, "we come to my presumed motive. No doubt the chairmanship of the Sewell and Val-lotton board will be offered to me but that doesn't mean that I shall accept it. In fact, I shall not. I am an extremely rich man, my dear sir, and my time is already fully occupied with much work. You will have to take my word for it, but I can assure you that I simply am not interested in becoming Sir Holman's successor."

Dover was now regarding Dr. Zlatt with the utmost loathing.  
"You'd have to say that!"

"I turned down the chairmanship of another company only last week and the fees were nearly double what I would get here."

Dover turned green with envy and fished out his last ace. "You were the only one with the opportunity to poison the sherry."

Dr. Zlatt trumped the ace. "Now that, my dear sir, is just not true. All the others were in the near vicinity of Sir Holman and had just as much chance as I did. Even more, I would imagine."

"They weren't waving papers all over to distract his attention."

Dr. Zlatt leaned back rather gracefully in his chair. "I'm afraid you have been slightly misinformed. I did talk to Sir Holman for several minutes and I did wave papers about. I was showing him the plans for a new research laboratory which Sewell and Vallotton are thinking of building. However, at that time, Sir Holman's glass of sherry was not in his hand."

Collapse of stout party. "Wadder y'mean?" gabbled Dover.

"Before looking at the plans Sir Holman quite naturally put his glass down so that he could have both his hands free. He stepped across to the boardroom table and left his glass by the things in front of his chair. You know about his habit of draining his glass at one gulp just before he opened the meeting?"

"Oh, damn and blast!" said Dover and retired from the interrogation in a sulk.

Dr. Zlatt proved that he could manage quite well without him. "I wonder if you would permit me to offer you a small suggestion, Sergeant?" he said, turning to MacGregor. "It's this problem of motive. Sir Holman wasn't the sort of man who had murderous enemies, certainly not among his fellow directors. On the other hand we are all of us interested in money. Now, as soon as the stock market gets wind of Sir Holman's death, Sewell and Vallotton shares will drop like a plummet of lead. Somebody with prior knowledge could, if you will excuse the expression, make a killing."

MacGregor looked up from his notebook. "You mean buying up shares in the hope they'll rise later, sir?"

"That's one possibility, but I was thinking of another manipulation. Selling short. A man contracts to sell at some future date shares which he doesn't yet possess. He hopes, of course, to be able to buy the shares meanwhile at a lower price and thus make a profit."

"Ah"—MacGregor had recently bought himself a paperback on the art of investing and reckoned he knew his way 'arounnd the corridors of high finance—"you mean a bull, sir?"

"Well," said Dr. Zlatt kindly, "it's a bear, actually, but you've got the right idea."

Dover sniggered and got a reproving glance from Dr. Zlatt.

"We'll have to look into this, sir," said MacGregor thoughtfully.

"I should get your Fraud Squad people on to it. They know their way around the City. You see, if somebody in that boardroom did deliberately kill Sir Holman so that the Sewell and Vallotton shares would drop, he certainly wouldn't have used his own name in his financial dealings. You'll probably need an expert to unravel all the complications."

"And what," asked Dover, removing a fat cigar from Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown's pigskin case, "do you think you're doing?"

MacGregor paused in mid-dialing. "I was calling the Yard, sir." "Wafor?"

"I thought we should follow up Dr. Zlatt's suggestion, sir, and see if anybody has been playing the market with Sewell and Vallotton shares."

"'Strewth!" said Dover, his piggy little eyes gleaming contempluously through a cloud of richly aromatic smoke. "You don't half like to do things the hard way."

MacGregor dropped the telephone back onto its stand. "Well," he said with as much patience as he could muster, "I really don't see what other line we can pursue at the moment, sir." He glanced in some despair at his notebook. "Our questioning of the four obvious suspects doesn't seem to have got us very far, does it? We can't do much about checking up where the poison came from until we know exactly what it was and it may be hours before the lab comes up with the answer. And as far as I can see from the rather muddled picture we've got of what happened immediately prior to the murder, any one of the four men could have put the poison in Sir Holman's glass of sherry."

MacGregor waited politely while Dover draped himself over the edge of the desk and coughed his heart up. "Actually I was wondering, sir, if perhaps we oughtn't to try staging a reconstruction of the crime. I don't know about you, sir, but I don't feel I've got a very clear idea of what people's movements really were. Of

course," added MacGregor rather bitterly, "it would perhaps have helped if we'd examined the boardroom first."

Dover, strangely enough, was no longer coughing. He was laughing. Uproariously, triumphantly, and quite obviously at MacGregor's expense.

MacGregor, his jaw locked, counted up to ten. "Sir?"

"Reconstruction of the crime!" spluttered Dover. "'Strewth, you'll be the death of me yet!"

MacGregor hoped so from the bottom of his heart, but he was inhibited by police discipline from voicing his desire aloud.

"We'll make the arrest after lunch," said Dover, rubbing it in.

"Arrest, sir? But—who are you going to arrest?"

Dover picked up his bowler hat and screwed it on his head. "What's-his-name—that Australian fellow."

Australian fellow? MacGregor almost sagged with relief. The old fool had gone clean off his rocker at last. Or did he mean Austrian? "Dr. Zlatt, sir?"

"No, not Zlatt; you damned fool! He wasn't Australian, was he?" Dover dragged himself to his feet and tapped the ash off his cigar onto the lush carpet. "The one who kept saying 'cooee.'" What's his name?" He looked at the labels on the little boxes. "FittsArthur. The Honorable Gisbert."

"The Honorable Gisbert FittsArthur, sir?" echoed MacGregor incredulously. "But you can't arrest him!"

"Oh, can't I?" scowled Dover. "You just wait and see, laddie!"

MacGregor wrung his hands and tried an appeal to reason and common sense. "Sir, you can't just charge a man with murder because you don't like the look of him. You have to have *evidence*. You can't run in a man of his standing as though he was just some smelly old tramp. He'll kick up the most frightful shindy, sir, and you'll be—"

"I've got evidence," Dover broke in crossly. "What do you think I am? An idiot?"

It was not a question that MacGregor dared to answer. "You've got evidence that the Honorable Gisbert FittsArthur murdered Sir Holman, sir?"

"As good as," muttered Dover, showing a belated sense of caution. "All it wants is a bit of checking. Motive and the like."

"A bit of checking? I see, sir. Well, would it be asking too much to inquire of what it consists?"

The ironic tone was not lost on Dover. His face twisted up into

a scowl. "Don't you start coming the old sarcastic with me, laddie!" he snarled. "I was solving crimes when you were still in diapers and don't you forget it! Here"—he grabbed the old-fashioned fountain pen out of the Honorable Gisbert's box and chucked it at MacGregor—"there's your blooming evidence!"

MacGregor turned the fountain pen over doubtfully in his hands and tried to fathom out where it could possibly fit into the murder. Of course, the Chief Inspector was probably as far off the beam as he usually was but you could never be sure. Once in a blue moon the bumbling old idiot did manage to make two and two add up to four and, when he did, MacGregor was never allowed to forget it.

Luckily Dover wasn't prepared to postpone his lunch one second longer than was absolutely necessary. "That's what he carried the poison in, nitwit!"

Light dawned and MacGregor could have kicked himself. Of course! Oh why, oh why hadn't he spotted it first? It was so childishly obvious when you knew. "The Honorable Gisbert filling his fountain pen from the chairman's inkwell!" he gasped.

Dover gave a withering sniff. "My God, it's taken you long enough to see it! You're that busy scribbling down every blooming word in your little book that you miss what's sticking right up under your nose. When this Gisbert joker went to fill his fountain pen with ink, Sir What's-his-name's glass of sherry was next to the inkwell on the boardroom table, wasn't it?"

MacGregor agreed eagerly that it was. "Dr. Zlatt told us that Sir Holman had put his glass down there—"

"And somebody else mentioned Gisbert filling his fountain pen."  
"Vice-Admiral Jonkett-Brown."

"But when I tried to use the pen there was no bloomin' ink in it! I couldn't get the damned thing to write at all."

MacGregor, prompted by the most unworthy of motives, clutched at a final straw. He unscrewed the cap of the fountain pen and tried it. It didn't write. He wiggled the little lever on the side hopefully, but it was no good: the fountain pen was empty.

"Of course, sir," MacGregor said, "this doesn't prove that the Honorable Gisbert squirted poison into Sir Holman's glass of sherry while pretending to fill his fountain pen from the inkwell."

"'Strewth!" roared Dover, heading for the door and his lunch. "You want it with jam on, you do. I've told you what happened, laddie. I've done my bit. The rest is up to you."

# William Arden

## The Bizarre Case Expert

*Are we experiencing a renaissance of the Locked Room mystery? It appears so—more locked-room detective stories have been submitted to EQMM in recent months than usually come our way in years; indeed, there have been periods in the past when not a single new locked-room story turned up from one lustrum to another. But, happily, the locked-room 'tec theme is now being revived, with more ingenious plots than you would expect in this, the 134th year of the detective story. And here, for your mystification, is an especially clever conception . . .*

### Detective: SERGEANT JOSEPH MARX

In our city before a case ends up in the Unsolved File it comes to the Central Squad, Inspector Frank Stockton in command. Most of the jobs at Central are big touchy cases like rackets, narcotics rings, bank holdups, counterfeiting, and the like. But not all.

Central gets anything that stumps the precinct squads—what we call the "circus cases." Or, to be more exact, I get them: Detective Sergeant Joseph Marx, the one-man Circus Case Squad.

This one began in the Tenth Precinct on Diamond Hill, one of our richer sections. I got it at 4:10 P.M. on a Monday. The Inspector gave me the word himself.

"What's their problem?" I asked warily.

"Well," the Inspector said solemnly, "it seems that they don't exactly know. Maybe it's a locked room or a perfect alibi or a vanished weapon. What I do know is, it's two days old."

"Two days? And they still don't know what the problem is?"

"They know they're in a hole. So go dig them out. Fast."

"I'll be back tonight."

I wasn't. It was the start of a long haul, but I didn't know that then. What I knew was, I was getting a reputation that wasn't good for me—The Circus Case Man. It could ruin me with my col-

leagues; they don't like hot-shots.

It didn't seem as if Lieutenant George Mastro thought I was a hot-shot. The Chief of the Tenth's Detective Squad looked as if he were sorry for me.

"We're stumped on this one, and so is Homicide," Mastro said bluntly. "How do you want to start?"

"I'll read the reports, if that's okay with you."

"Fine. Maybe you can spot something we've missed."

The first report was by Patrolman Sid Lewis in the tortured style of a man who agonized over paperwork. At 12:22 A.M. Saturday night Lewis and his partner, Patrolman Ed Lincoln, went to investigate a complaint of noise.

They found 1415 Laguna Terrace to be a new apartment house with a well-lighted lobby and a doorman. In the lobby they met the manager, the doorman, and two female tenants. The two women were irate over the noise being made by "that tramp in 6-B."

The manager had a different view, and said, in Lewis' stilted words, "Mrs. Sally Tower is an excellent tenant. She is a well-known interior decorator, and a lady. Her only visitors, so far as I know, are her business associates, her fiancé Mr. Tolliver, and her ex-husband. She is not a giver of noisy parties."

The ladies, according to Lewis who wrote down every detail he could remember whether it seemed important or not, had more to say about Mrs. Tower, including: "Crazy way she dresses!"—"That sick apartment!"—"Arty egghead with no morals!" Lewis put it all down, apparently on the way up to 6-B. When he got there all was quiet in 6-B.

With the ladies and the manager in tow, Lewis knocked on the door. There was no response; no sounds at all.

"She's in there all right," said a lady, later identified as Mrs. Kuzco. "I've been watching her door. Yelling and shouting something awful!"

Lewis asked the manager to use his passkey. The manager did, but it turned out that the door was chained on the inside. Suspicious of the total silence, Lewis and Lincoln managed to kick the door in.

At that point Lewis and Lincoln were busy for a few minutes. The ladies screamed. The manager actually fainted. People poured out of the other apartments to stare at the carnage.

The reason for the silence in 6-B was now clear: murder. . .

Lewis officially reported the scene: "After restoring order I crossed a large foyer into a living room. The room was in great disorder from some violent struggle.

"A female Caucasian, aged about 30 years, lay on the floor near a bedroom door. There was considerable blood, all fresh. I ascertained her condition, bloodying my person and uniform, and found her to be dead.

"A male Caucasian, aged about 40, lay some feet away, near a dining table. He was unconscious, bloody, breathing in a shallow manner, but was not dead.

"I observed that the window to the fire escape was open. The manager having revived, I asked him to identify the body, and sent Patrolman Lincoln to examine the area beneath the fire escape. The manager, having examined the female body, identified her as Mrs. Sally Tower. He identified the injured man as Mr. Paul Tower, her ex-husband. I then called the precinct and reported. The time was 12:32 A.M. I remained in the apartment until the arrival of detectives."

Patrolman Lincoln's report added only that he had found nothing in the yard or basement, that the yard was all concrete, that the other buildings were close and had similar yards. I turned to the report of the Medical Examiner.

Mrs. Sally Tower, 32, had died of multiple blows to her head by a blunt instrument. Her left arm was broken, and her head had four distinct skull fractures. She had died between 12:00 midnight and 12:45 A.M. Since the patrolmen had arrived at 12:28, and the noise had ceased about 12:20, the time of murder was fixed in those eight minutes.

Paul Tower, 40, had suffered concussion, a hairline skull fracture, and a broken nose, all from two blows to the head. According to the M.E., Tower had been unconscious about thirty minutes when the M.E. arrived at 12:50 A.M. The one blow on the cranium, in the M.E.'s opinion, had rendered Tower instantly unconscious. The M.E. had revived Tower who was now in good condition in the hospital.

Paul Tower's own statement came in two parts. The first statement, unsigned, had been given at 12:57 A.M. when he had regained consciousness: "A man, tall, masked—came in window, didn't see—too late. He hit me. I fell. Sally? Where's Sally? . . ."

Tower's formal statement had been taken at 10:00 A.M. Sunday morning in the hospital:

"I called on my ex-wife, Mrs. Sally Tower, at 10:00 P.M. Saturday night. I went to ask her what plans she had to marry Max Tolliver. She informed me that she was seriously considering re-marriage, which was good news. We had a few drinks on it and became a little intoxicated. Yes, we made considerable noise.

"Shortly after midnight I became aware of a man in the room, wearing work clothes. I challenged him. Sally screamed—more than once, I'm sure. I attempted to defend us, but he hit me with a small statue. I fell and must have struck my head. I remember nothing more until I was revived by the police."

I sat back and stared at the reports. I didn't read any more, but went to find Lieutenant Mastro.

"What is this?" I said. "Looks like a routine killing by a prowler, that's all."

"Yeah," Mastro said, and stood up. "Except that it isn't routine and it wasn't a prowler."

In the back seat of the squad car on our way to 1415 Laguna Terrace, Mastro told me, "We too were sure at first. Even after we found that nothing was disturbed in any other room, and nothing was missing. We figured the intruder panicked and ran right after killing. So we started the normal routine.

"We found no evidence of an intruder anywhere. Nothing that didn't belong in the place, and no fingerprints except Mrs. Tower's, Paul Tower's, some of her business friends', and the apartment-house manager's."

The killer must have worn gloves and was careful. Obviously Tower didn't notice the gloves."

Mastro shrugged and went on, "A panicky prowler usually leaves *some* evidence, but okay, let's say he was lucky. So we started on the neighbors. That's when the roof fell in. You remember Mrs. Kuzco in Lewis' report? She was watching the front door of 6-B and swears no one came out after midnight.

"Anyway, the front door of 6-B was chained on the inside. So was the back door. There're no other doors. All the windows are sheer drops, and besides, they were locked on the inside. Except the open fire-escape window."

"A Mrs. Miller in Apartment 1-B stated she'd been sitting at her window directly under the fire escape all evening. She's an invalid. She likes to look out of that window. She saw no one go up or come down the fire escape all night. Everyone else with a win-

dow facing the fire escape was home, and no prowler entered their apartments.

"A Mr. Bugatti, in the building directly behind our 6-B, had been attracted by the noise in 6-B, so he too was watching the fire-escape window. He saw no one go in or out. He saw no one go down the fire escape to the yard, or up the fire escape to the roof.

"In other words, Marx, there's no way anyone could have left 6-B except by the fire-escape window—and no one went through that window."

I sat and let it sink in. The classical locked room. Only there isn't any such thing. There's *always* an explanation. Except in this case I couldn't see one. Unless I could find some flaw in what Mastro had told me.

The lobby of the building was bright and bare. The only way out was past the doorman. The door of 6-B opened into the apartment foyer that Patrolman Lewis had described.

The foyer hit me hard. I saw why the ladies of 1415 Laguna Terrace hadn't taken to Mrs. Tower. She had been a very "arty" interior decorator, all right.

The foyer walls were purple. The rug had purple and white stripes. The ancient, upright-style telephone was painted lavender and had a rhinestone-encrusted dial in a lavender marble base. The phone stood on a side table made from a Colonial washstand—complete with chamber pot. A grotesque hat tree was topped with a boar's head. There was a beautifully simple, genuine 17th Century bench next to a sideboard in fake marble that was the cheapest modern.

Mrs. Tower had been in the thick of the latest fad for odd decoration and old-fashioned ugliness, and the living room was a lot more of the same. It was a chaos of ugly Victorian, clean 17th Century, and ultramodern—mixed with things like rotted old fire bellows when there wasn't even a fireplace.

Mastro pointed to the spots where the bodies had been found. The marble statue used on Tower was on the floor near a heavy table. There was blood on the statue, and a gash on a table leg.

I checked every way out I could think of—even from inside the closets. There were only the two doors and the fire-escape window. Modern apartments don't have secret panels.

"Okay," I said, "so there's no way out. I don't believe in magic, so it has to be Tower himself. They fought, maybe she hit him

with the statue and broke his nose, he went crazy and hammered her to death. In the struggle he fell and hit his head and was knocked out. She may even have died after he became unconscious."

Mastro nodded. "The M.E. thinks she did. He thinks she was alive when he was knocked out, which fits his story."

"But he has to be lying. No one could have come into this room."

"He's got the motive," Mastro agreed. "He was paying big alimony, and he wanted to marry a Dolores Finch, but he couldn't afford to marry again unless the alimony stopped. That could happen only if Mrs. Tower married again, and her fiancé, Toliver, said she wouldn't set a definite date. She had Tower in a bind."

"They brawled about it, she hit him, and he went berserk. It's the kind of motive that makes a man go crazy. He had to beg, and she probably laughed at him."

"Sounds fine," Mastro agreed.

That was when I got the uneasy feeling. Mastro was agreeing too easily—and besides, they hadn't arrested Tower.

"Okay," I said, "what's the kicker this time?"

Mastro shrugged. "We can't find the weapon that killed Mrs. Tower. It isn't in the room."

No weapon? In a room that no one had left?

"Impossible," I said.

"Sure," Mastro said, "but the M.E. and the lab insist that nothing we found could have killed her. The M.E. says the weapon was solid and sort of circular and narrow. It had to be pretty long to hit so deep. The statue doesn't fit. There are two pokers, but they don't fit. We found a hammer, but that doesn't fit. Two paperweights are all wrong in size and shape."

"Most of the lamps would fit the wounds, but none of them had any blood, hair or bone on them, or Tower's prints. Nothing we gave the lab had blood, hair, skin or bone on it, and nothing had Tower's prints. Her prints were on the statue that she hit Tower with, but she sure didn't hit herself."

"Tower got rid of it."

"We searched the whole place, every square inch, and outside the windows for at least two hundred feet. No holes, no water, nothing in the trees, no drainpipes, and nothing hanging. Anyway, he *couldn't* have gotten rid of it."

"How do you figure that?"

"The M.E. said that Tower was knocked out the instant he got that blow on the cranium. There's no way a man can hit his own head hard enough to knock himself out for that long, or make that bad a wound, except by running full speed into a wall."

I nodded. "In other words Tower had to fall violently to hit his head that hard."

"That's it," Mastro said. "If he battled with his wife she somehow knocked him out before she collapsed herself. And if he was knocked out *during* the brawl, or just as it ended, he couldn't have gotten a weapon out of the room. So it has to be here."

I looked around the garish room. I looked at everything Mastro hadn't taken away to be examined. There was nothing that fitted the requirements. The vases were too light. The pitchers, jugs, ashtrays were too small. Nothing movable was shaped right or hard enough.

"Of course," Mastro said, "if Tower *is* telling the truth, then it fits fine. The prowler carried off the weapon."

"Okay," I said, "then the witnesses made some mistake."

"That puts you right on our schedule," Mastro said. He was not being sarcastic. He was serious. "That's what we decided, and that's when the Captain figured a new man could help."

"I've been a big help," I said.

"You're helping. Do we try the witnesses again?"

"We try," I said. "One thing. I'd rule out a prowler or burglar. I've been thinking—a prowler wouldn't go into a lighted room where two people were partying out loud. I think it had to be someone who knew them, or at least her."

"That's good; I didn't think of that," Mastro said; "but I did check all the men in her life. They all have alibis."

"How good?"

"Airtight. For instance, the boyfriend, Max Tolliver, was in Los Angeles giving a talk until 11:00 P.M. No doubt."

"What about the women? Tower's lady friend, Dolores Finch, for instance? He wanted to marry her, and the wife was preventing it."

"She doesn't have much of an alibi. Says she was home alone. But Tower says it was a man, a tall man."

"What if Tower and Dolores Finch were in it together? He's lying to give her an alibi."

"Damn!" Mastro said. "Maybe you've got it!"

The Lieutenant was excited. The idea of a plot between Tower and another person could hold the key to how the killer got in and out. Mastro decided to see if he could locate anyone who had seen Dolores Finch leave her apartment Saturday night. I went to talk with the witnesses.

If I was right and Tower had used an accomplice, there still had to be some way the accomplice had got in and out.

This time I was excited, too. It was a good feeling. It didn't last long. The three witnesses were adamant.

"No, I never left the door," Mrs. Kuzco said. "No telephone call. I got no baby, and I wasn't cooking. I tell you, no one came out."

Mrs. Miller said, "I need help to move, Sergeant. I didn't doze and I saw no one at all. No one."

I pressed. "Maybe it was someone you saw but didn't really notice? The manager? A handyman? A woman acting casual?"

"No one, Sergeant, I'm positive."

Mr. Bugatti across the yard admitted, "I sort of like to watch that window, see? She was a good-looking woman. Saturday I watched real good 'cause she was partying. I didn't see no one near that window. Just talking, shouting, banging around."

"Was there movement inside the window after the noise stopped?"

"Nope, not even a shadow. Just awful quiet."

I had to give up. I went back to the Tenth's squadroom. I was still trying to think it out when Mastro came back. He looked as discouraged as I was when he dropped into a chair.

"No one saw the Finch woman leave her place. I checked all the women Mrs. Tower worked with. They're clean. If it was an intruder, Joe, it's going into the Unsolved File. That's it."

There are a lot of cases in the Unsolved File: every cop has at least one, and no cop likes it. Those are the cases you dream about ten years later. You know you missed something, and they still rankle even on the day you retire.

I wouldn't give up. "Let's say the witnesses are right. So let's go back to Tower himself. I've been thinking about his story. It was fast, pat, and the only decent story he could tell. And it absolutely depends on the weapon being missing.

"He couldn't have hidden the weapon, and if he was knocked out in the brawl it doesn't stand to reason he had the story ready before he blacked out. He couldn't have invented the yarn while he was unconscious."

Mastro agreed, "So when did he do it?"

"He had to invent it after he woke up. Say that he actually revived a few minutes before anyone noticed. You were all busy, so you might have missed it."

"Go on," Mastro said.

"He saw something in the apartment that gave him the idea you would miss the weapon. He heard you talking in a way that showed you suspected some prowler. You did think that at the time, right?"

"Yeah. I was sending men out to find witnesses."

"So he heard you, and he saw that maybe you'd miss the weapon. He had nothing to lose by telling a desperate story."

Mastro stood up. "Damn it, let's find that weapon!"

We returned to Apartment 6-B and searched again. We turned that living room upside down. I even tried every table leg to see if it was loose. There just wasn't anything.

"No weapon," Mastro said.

We sat down in that clutter of gaudy and grotesque objects from half a hundred periods of human artifacts. We were grim and bitter.

"You can't win 'em all," Mastro said.

I didn't answer. I was sitting where I could see all the way across the room into the foyer. Then I saw it.

"Mastro," I said. "Right in front of our eyes!"

He whirled, looked into the foyer. "Where? What?"

"There! The telephone!"

I hurried into the foyer and looked at that purple telephone. An old-fashioned, antique telephone! Upright like a club, made of hard rubber and with a heavy marble base. It fitted the description of the wound, and it had a long, thirty-foot extension cord that would easily reach to where the body of Mrs. Tower had been found.

"So obvious," I said, "that we overlooked it every time! Right in front of our noses, but so familiar we didn't see it. A modern telephone wouldn't be heavy enough, but this one is. It even has blood on it!"

"Yeah," Mastro said. I heard a sad, weary tone in his voice.

I stared at him. "Something wrong?"

Mastro sighed. "I got excited too. But look where it is, Joe."

I looked. It was on the foyer side table where it was obviously supposed to be since the wall connection was there.

"It's twenty feet or more from where the body was," Mastro said. "We know Tower couldn't have gotten any weapon out of the living room before he passed out, right? He couldn't have hit her with the phone, then carried it out to the foyer."

"The blood on it?" I said weakly, feeling my inspiration fading.

"Lewis used it to call in, Joe. Remember, he had a lot of blood on him from examining Mrs. Tower."

After that there was nothing to do but go back downtown and brood. Mastro had other work to do, and so did I. How long could we work on one impossible case?

I went back to my regular assignments. Up in the Tenth, Mastro continued to comb Diamond Hill for any reports of a prowler. He continued to hammer at the alibis but nothing developed, and Tower had to be released when he left the hospital.

But I couldn't get the case out of my mind. I went over and over it lying awake at night, or on stakeouts in other cases. Twice, on my own time, I went up to Diamond Hill and searched the whole ground again. Then after giving it a week's rest I decided to start once more from the beginning.

I began with Patrolman Lewis' report.

And that's when I spotted it.

Mastro had Lewis and the rest of his men who had worked on the case in his office when I arrived at the Tenth. I started right in on Patrolman Lewis.

"Lewis," I asked, "where was the telephone in the Tower apartment when you used it to call in to precinct?"

"Well," Lewis began, frowning in thought.

"Think, man! Where were you standing when you called?"

Lewis brightened. "Sure, I remember. I was right near the body. Let's see, yeah, the telephone was in the living room on a coffee table near the body."

Mastro blinked at Lewis. "Not in the foyer, Lewis?"

"No, sir," Lewis said firmly. "I remember I was looking down at Mrs. Tower while I talked to you."

I said, "Was it lying on its side? Knocked over?"

"No, Sergeant, it was just standing there regular like."

"You're sure it wasn't on the floor near the body?"

Lewis was shocked. "I wouldn't have touched anything that was on the floor near the body, Sergeant!"

Mastro roared, "But it's in the foyer now! How did it get *there*?"

I said, "After you called in, Lewis, where did you put the telephone?"

"Right back where it was," Lewis said, and then he stopped. His eyes blinked. "No, I think maybe I set it out of the way some. Yeah, I remember now. That long cord was tangling up the room, so I set it over on an end table near the wall."

Mastro looked a little stunned. "You moved it? How far?"

"Well, maybe three or four feet, sir. Just across the room."

"So how did it get into the foyer?" Mastro demanded.

Mastro's men fidgeted, stammered, and slowly the whole story came out. One after the other, Mastro's men told the saga of that telephone. I listened, fascinated.

One detective had called Homicide. He remembered that the telephone had been on an end table in the living room. He moved it to a chest because the long cord was always getting in the way.

Another detective had called the laboratory. He put the telephone on a table near the door to the foyer.

A third officer recalled that the ambulance men had used the telephone. He didn't remember where they put it down.

Someone thought that the M.E. had used the telephone. And he was pretty sure the M.E. had been in the foyer when he used it.

I listened in a kind of dream. I could almost see the progress of the telephone across the living room and into the foyer. Each police pair of hands moved it another few feet, all innocent, and all oblivious of what they were doing. The peripatetic phone.

Mastro groaned. "I think I even used it myself once."

No one actually recalled wiping the phone, but Lewis said he might have, and the others admitted they might have. Later it turned out that the M.E. had also wiped it when he'd used it in the foyer.

Mastro sent them all out with a snarl. Then he glared at me.

"Okay, that's how it got to the foyer; but how did it get on that coffee table near Sally Tower's body? I mean, Tower was knocked out in the fight. He couldn't have set it upright on that coffee table. Are you saying it just *happened* to fall from his hands after he clobbered her and land upright on the table?"

"Maybe," I said, "but I don't think so."

I went to the door of Mastro's office. I told them to bring in the manager of Laguna Terrace whom I'd called to come down and wait. The manager entered nervously.

"When you went into Mrs. Tower's apartment with the officers,"

I asked him, "where was the telephone?"

"The telephone? You mean that purple one?" the manager said.

"That purple one," I said.

"Well, let me see," the manager said, thinking. "I fainted, you know—the shock and all. Well, when I revived, the officer asked me to identify the body. I went to the body, yes, and—wait, I remember! The officer was busy for a moment with the other officer and I had to wait. I was standing over poor Mrs. Tower—"

The manager stopped, closed his eyes. "Yes, I was just standing there and waiting. The telephone was lying on the floor near poor Mrs. Tower. The telephone was knocked over and the cord was all tangled up. Very messy. I picked it up, straightened out the cord, and put it on a coffee table."

"You put it on the nearest table," I said softly. "You sort of cleaned up a bit?"

The manager nodded. "Yes, that's it. I'm rather neat about my rooms. One does it automatically, you see? I mean, after a time when you run an apartment house you sort of have a reflex to keep the place neat."

"Automatic," I said. "You see a telephone knocked over, so you just automatically pick it up and put it on a table."

The manager beamed. "Exactly. I hate mess."

After the manager left, Mastro and I just sat there.

"That's what Tower saw when he revived," I said. "He saw the telephone standing all tidy on a table quite a distance from the body. He heard you and your men talking about a prowler. He realized you'd probably never think of the telephone. He didn't know how or why it had been removed from where it had fallen after he used it to beat Mrs. Tower, but he saw a chance and invented a prowler."

Mastro looked sick. "He had an accomplice after all—an unconscious, automatic accomplice."

In the end the lab examined that purple telephone with a microscope. It had been wiped pretty good, but it still had traces of fingerprints on it; but more important, they found tiny fragments of bone and hair, and with no other possible killer in that room the jury didn't take long to find Tower guilty.

Inspector Stockton was pleased with me in the end, and up in the Tenth the boys pulled a lot of extra duty for a while. And the Chief issued a loud blast to all precincts—never-touch *anything* on the scene of a murder. Nothing! Ever!

# **Ellery Queen**

## **Half a Clue**

*In which Ellery demonstrates "instant detection" . . .*

### **Detective: ELLERY QUEEN**

**M**orning. When the doctor left, Ellery ran down to the corner drug store.

"The doctor wants dad to start on the antibiotic as soon as possible, Henry," Ellery said to the owner of the pharmacy. "Can you fill this while I wait?"

"Sure, these come all made up," said Henry Brubuck. "Albert, fill this for Mr. Queen right away, will you?"

The twins, Albert and Alice, who like their stepfather were registered pharmacists, were busy behind the high partition of the Prescription Department. Albert took Inspector Queen's prescription and greeted Ellery heartily; but Alice, whose eyes were on the red side, merely gave him a wan smile. "Sorry your father's sick, Ellery."

"It's some virus or other."

"The neighborhood's full of viruses. And that reminds me." The old pharmacist went over to his soda fountain and drew some water. "Forgot to take my own antibiotic dose this morning."

Henry Brubuck dipped into his gray store jacket for a little white box. It had some yellow-and-green capsules in it; he swallowed one and returned the box to his pocket. "Druggist, heal thyself, eh, Ellery? My doctor says I'm the worst patient he has."

"I live with an old coot, Henry, who'll give you cards and spades," said Ellery dolefully. "Thanks, Albert. Charge it, will you?" And he hurried out.

The moment Ellery was gone, Alice set a bottle of cough mixture down on the prescription counter and said tensely, "Dad, I've got to talk to you. Please?"

"All right, honey," sighed Henry Brubuck; he knew what was coming. "Take over, Albert. We won't be long."

"Good luck, sis," said Albert in a low voice. But his twin was already running up the stairs that led from the back room to the Brubuck apartment over the store.

Her stepfather followed patiently. A man did his best to bring up his dead wife's children, he thought, but somehow he always seemed to do the wrong thing. The twins were one problem after another; and he rarely saw his other stepson, Alvin, who was a used-car salesman, since Alvin's marriage.

"It's about Ernie again?" the old man asked his stepdaughter.

"Yes, daddy," said Alice passionately. "And please don't put me off any longer. I tell you I love Ernie. I want to marry him—"

"—but he won't marry you unless \$10,000 goes along with you," her stepfather said dryly. "Some romantic! Honey, what kind of fellow is it who makes a package deal out of a marriage proposal? What kind of life would you have with a loafer who's even been in trouble with the police?"

Alice burst into heartbroken tears. "You think I'm Elizabeth Taylor or something? I know what I look like, daddy. If you don't give Ernie that money, he'll marry Sadie Rausch. I'll die if he does—I'll do something—something desperate."

Old Brubuck put his arm around the sobbing girl. "Don't talk like that, baby. Believe me, you're better off without him."

Alice raised her swollen eyes. "Then you won't give me the money? That's final?"

"It's for your own good, honey. You'll meet some nice boy—"

Alice grew very quiet. Then, just as quietly, she went back downstairs. Henry Brubuck stood where he was, appalled. There had been a look on his stepdaughter's face . . .

*Noon.* Old Brubuck was jarred out of his after-lunch nap by the eruption of the extension phone. Half asleep, he reached over from the bed and picked up the receiver just as the phone was answered in the Prescription Department downstairs.

"Brubuck's Pharmacy," he heard Albert say.

The old man was about to hang up when a heavy voice said, "Gimme Albert Brubuck. This is the book store."

Book store? thought Henry Brubuck, suddenly alert. Albert hadn't been inside a book store since leaving college. Had he been secretly playing the horses again? The pharmacist listened. He was right; it was Albert's bookie.

"Listen, welsher," the bookie said. "You think I'm gonna carry

you forever? You're into me for eight grand, Pill Boy, and I want my dough. Now."

"Wait, wait," Albert said; his stepfather could tell that the boy was badly frightened. "So you'll have your goons work me over, Joe. How will that get you your money? Give me just another few days, Joe. What do you say?"

"Is this another one of your runarounds?"

"Joe, I swear, I'm working on the old man." Henry Brubuck could almost hear Albert sweat. "A few days more and I've got it made. How about it? All right, Joe?"

"Okay. But I don't get my eight grand by Friday night, kid, you start praying."

The pharmacist waited until his stepson hung up before replacing the bedroom receiver. So he's working on me, is he? thought the old man. Poor Albert. He wasn't a bad boy—except for the horses. Henry Brubuck had settled a great many of his younger stepson's gambling debts before putting his foot down; he had had to put a stop to it.

Then what had Albert meant. . . ?

*Evening.* The old pharmacist trudged upstairs from his drug store and stopped in his kitchen to have a look at the roast that Alice had in the oven. He could hear his other stepson, Alvin, and Alvin's wife talking in the living room. Alvin had phoned with a rather ashamed "Hiya, Pop!" to invite himself and Gloria to dinner. The old man wondered what Alvin's wife was after this time.

He found out immediately—Gloria had a penetrating voice.

"Well, then you just ask that old miser *again*, Alvin! I'm not letting you pass up this chance to buy into the car agency for a measly \$15,000!"

"But Pop thinks they're in trouble and are out to take me," Alvin said feebly.

"Pop thinks! What does he know about it? Are you going back on your promise to me, Alvin Brubuck?"

"No, Gloria," said Alvin in a harassed way. "I told you I'd ask Pop again, and I will. Do you have to keep hacking away at me?"

"And you remind him that most of the money he's got is really yours and the twins. You *make* him give you your share, or else!"

"All right, all right!" shouted Henry Brubuck's other stepson. "I'll do whatever you want! Just stop hounding me!"

*The Following Night.* "I don't quite get what's bothering you, Henry," Inspector Queen said. He was in pajamas and bathrobe, still nursing his virus, but Ellery had long since given up trying to keep him in bed. "Okay, you won't buy Alice this crumbum the poor kid's set on marrying; and you won't pay off any more of Albert's gambling debts—and don't worry about that bookie's threats, I'll take care of *him*; you won't finance the partnership Alvin's wife wants because you're convinced it's a bad deal. Seems to me you're acting like a responsible parent. What's the problem?"

"The problem, I think, dad," said Ellery, frowning, "is that Henry is afraid for his life."

The Inspector stared. "You're kidding, Henry."

The pharmacist shook his head. "I wish I were, Inspector."

"But *murder*? All right, they're not your children. But the twins aren't delinquents, and no matter what a shrew Alvin's wife is, Alvin himself is a hard-working boy—"

"If you're right about this, Henry," Ellery said, "there's a simple way to discourage murder for profit. I take it you have a will, and that Alice, Albert, and Alvin get everything?"

"Of course."

"Then simply write a new will cutting them out. No profit, no danger, period."

Old Brubuck shook his head. "I can't do that, Ellery. I promised their mother on her deathbed that they'd inherit. Most of what I have she left me. Her children are entitled to it when I die."

"Drat it, Henry," the Inspector said testily, "if you're so sure they're out to kill you, give them the money now."

"I can't. It would bankrupt me. I'd even lose my drug store." Brubuck laughed bitterly. "I'm losing my mind, too! I clean forgot to take my last dose of antibiotic. Ellery, could I have a little water?"

While Ellery went for some, the Inspector said, "Blast it all, Henry, I'm afraid there's nothing I can do before a crime is committed. That's the law."

"Besides which, Henry, you're holding something back," Ellery said as he returned with a glass of water. "I know you wouldn't dream up a murder plot merely on what you've told us. There's something more definite, isn't there?"

"I can't believe it yet," Brubuck nodded miserably. He fished a yellow-and-red capsule out of his little white box without even

looking at it, and swallowed it with a sip of water. "But the fact is, some poison's been taken from a pharmaceutical cabinet in my back room."

The druggist named the poison, and the Queens exchanged grave glances; it was lethal in very small quantities, and it brought death on the gallop.

"I know it was stolen some time during the past thirty-six hours," Brubuck continued. "I even know which one of my step-children stole it, though I can't prove it."

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" the Inspector exploded. "Which one of them stole it?"

The pharmacist said with sudden difficulty, "It . . . was . . . Al—" and stopped with a gasp.

He began to choke and claw the air. An inhuman change came over his face. His body convulsed. His knees collapsed. Then, incredibly, he was spread out on the Queens' floor like a bludgeoned beef.

"*Dead.*" The Inspector, ghastly pale, looked up from the pharmacist's corpse. "Murdered in front of our eyes. Do you smell the poison, son?"

"It was in that capsule he just swallowed." Ellery snatched the white box from the quiet hand and opened it. It was empty. "It was his last dose, all right," he said wildly. "Why didn't I realize—?"

"Killed him as soon as the capsule dissolved." Inspector Queen was still dazed. "One of the three filled an empty capsule with the poison and managed to substitute it for the last antibiotic capsule in his box. If he'd only lived long enough to finish the name—."

"Maybe," Ellery said suddenly, "it doesn't matter."

"But, son, all he got to say was 'Al—'. He could have meant Alice or Albert or Alvin. That's only half a clue—the useless half!"

"Half a clue, dad, is better than no clue."

The Inspector shot erect. "Ellery Queen, do you mean to stand here and say that Henry Brubuck drops dead at our feet, and practically as he hits the floor you know who killed him?"

Ellery said, "Yes."

#### CHALLENGE TO THE READER

*Which of his three stepchildren murdered Henry Brubuck? And how did Ellery know?*

Ellery explained that while he had been in the dead man's pharmacy the previous morning, waiting for the Inspector's prescription to be filled, he had witnessed Henry Brubuck take one of his own antibiotic capsules from the box—a yellow-and-green capsule.

"Just now," Ellery went on, "we both saw him swallow a yellow-and-red capsule from the box. Too bad Henry didn't bother to look at it—he knew there was only one left, or he'd certainly have noticed the discrepancy in color. And it all happened so fast I didn't have time to recall it."

"The question is, then: Which of Brubuck's stepchildren—he stated as a fact he knew it was one of them—substituted a home-made yellow-and-red capsule containing poison for the last of the yellow-and-green manufactured capsules containing the antibiotic?

"Well, would a pharmacist, with a professional's knowledge of standard antibiotic preparations, have used a *different-colored capsule* when the object was to trick the victim, himself a pharmacist, into swallowing it? Hardly. Only a *non-pharmacist* could be guilty of such ignorance or oversight.

"So the poisoner can't be either of the twins, Alice or Albert, because both are registered pharmacists. Therefore it has to be the car salesman, Alvin . . . at the instigation, I'm afraid, of that virago he's married to!"



# **Leslie Ford**

## **The Supreme Court Murder**

*Not the least interesting aspect of this short novel is its extraordinary setting—extraordinary, that is, for a murder—the chamber of the Supreme Court of the United States, the highest judicial body of the nation, and surely one of the most unlikely places ever conceived as the locale of a murder, and surely at one of the most unlikely times—when the Chief Justice and the eight Associate Justices were in public session! The nine justices were "not ordinary men in black silk, but nine august figures, beyond passion and prejudice, on their brows the majesty and wisdom of the Law"—and these nine men were eyewitnesses to a murder! Indeed, the vital facts in the case were almost impossible to believe, and some of them were impossible—until Colonel John Primrose, 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), nobly assisted by Sergeant Phineas T. Buck, also 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), put his sharp, probing mind to work...*

*A fascinating short novel from "The Golden Age of the Detective Story"—complete in this anthology...*

### **Detective: COLONEL JOHN PRIMROSE**

Now that the nine black-robed justices of the Supreme Court have moved out of the Capitol to their new, gleaming temple of justice across the Plaza, the cold-blooded ingenuity of the murder of Thomas Pomeroy can never be repeated. The small semicircular chamber where they sat under the clock on the gallery—scene of the second step in the ruthless crimes that took place round the family of Thomas Pomeroy—has been deserted, and the sonorous "Oyez and oyez!" has rung for the last time under the felt-padded dome as the justices came gravely into the chamber.

There were exactly eleven people in the room at 12:45 that af-

ternoon in October, apart from those who belonged: court attendants, members of the bar, and the nine justices. They were the eyewitnesses of the strangest event that ever took place in the historic old chamber.

It happened on Monday. Colonel John Primrose, 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), temporary special investigator for the Postal Department, and Sergeant Phineas T. Buck, 92nd Engineers U.S.A. (Retired), his guard, philosopher, and friend, came into the corridor in front of the old chamber shortly after half-past eleven. Although Sergeant Buck usually walked a step behind the Colonel—it was a mark of respect, in the first place, and, in the second, he could see over his head quite easily—most people looked at him first. In fact, if it had not been for Sergeant Buck's grim iron pan, his rigidly erect six-feet-four, and the great shoulders that had helped make him heavyweight champion of the Army years before, most people would not have seen Colonel Primrose at all. It was only the way he cocked his head and looked up with a pair of black eyes as bright and shrewd as a wise, wicked old parrot's that suggested something more than a pleasant elderly gentleman.

Gray-haired and a little bald, one knee a little stiff, Colonel Primrose was below medium height and on the plump side, slow-moving, a little sentimental, and quite unmilitary. He sometimes wondered, in fact, if he had been military enough in allowing Sergeant Buck to take complete charge of him the way he had, as chauffeur, valet, butler, housekeeper, and manager.

As they came into the corridor, Mr. Justice Pettijohn, stooped and fragile, was coming slowly from the elevator on his way to the robing room. As he saw Colonel Primrose, his face clouded and he stopped.

"I hear you went to look into the Thompson Airways crash?" he asked.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I hope you didn't lose anyone, sir."

"An old friend," Mr. Justice Pettijohn said sadly. He hesitated, a question in his eyes.

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "I'm sorry, sir," he said gently. "None of them was recognizable. The plane burned out in the marsh."

Mr. Justice Pettijohn passed his thin blue-veined hand across his forehead.

"It's bitterly ironic," he said after a moment. "His crashing that

way. He was going to address the meeting of the Women's Defense League here in the Capitol Building last night—on the place of women in military aviation. I'd expected him to lunch today."

He shook his head and turned away. Colonel Primrose watched him go slowly toward the robing room. Garrow, secret-service man attached to the Supreme Court, bowed and opened the door for him. Colonel Primrose turned stiffly to where Sergeant Buck's giant form was standing at attention behind him.

"He meant Julian Block," he said. "Strange, wasn't it?"

"You get it when it's coming to you, sir," Sergeant Buck said philosophically. "Whether you're in an airplane or home in bed. It's what they call fate."

Colonel Primrose smiled and glanced at his watch. Men were busily dashing in and out of the clerk's office across the corridor. He looked at them curiously. Colonel Primrose was very inquisitive, both by nature and profession, and, furthermore, it was not often that he found himself on Capitol Hill so early in the day. In fact, he could not recall the last time he had attended a session of the Supreme Court. They were usually pretty dull, from a layman's point of view, and tourists kept coming in and going out, which made it harder than ever to keep your mind on what was going on. At the present moment, however, and for a very particular reason, he was watching the bustle and hurry in the narrow corridor with a lively professional interest.

He went on toward the entrance and, without turning his gray head—it turned with difficulty, thanks to a German bullet through the neck—he took in the half circle of a room, the domed ceiling, the illuminated skylights, the three red-velvet-draped windows over the low gallery. The gallery itself, across the entrance, was supported by pillars of Potomac marble that made a background for the mahogany bar and the nine dark leather chairs in which the nine justices would sit when the hands of the white-faced clock on the gallery rail stood at 12:00.

Colonel Primrose stood an instant in the door; then turned to a bench at the right. He sat down, straightened out his stiff knee with both hands, settled back, feeling the awed silence that hung over the room, and looked about him. In the space before the bar was a long table with four chairs where opposing counsel sat. Directly in front of the Chief Justice's chair was a sloped reading desk, where counsel stood to argue before the Court. Toward Col-

onel Primrose there were chairs arranged in semicircular rows, for members of the bar, and curved benches for the public, extending round the circumference of the room.

Pages in blue suits kept coming in and out. Messengers came and went, all very quietly, through the door at the end of the semicircle to Colonel Primrose's right. That door, he knew, led across a narrow corridor to the marshal's room. Off one end of the corridor was the Attorney General's office. At the other end were a lavatory and a flight of iron steps leading up to the gallery. Colonel Primrose glanced up across the room at it. He could see a closed door at each end, left and right, of the semicircle.

Colonel Primrose, waiting for the justices to enter, was really not particularly interested in the architecture of the chamber, except for the blank niches on either side of the main entrance, once intended for statues but now fitted with leather seats just wide enough to hold two and a half people. One of them was now occupied by a dark-haired, furtive-eyed man in a brown corduroy suit. In the other niche was a girl. Colonel Primrose had noticed her as soon as he sat down. She had on a blue-colored dress and a mink scarf. She had one lovely brown eye and one delicately arched but very definite dark eyebrow, and a soft mop of gleaming red-gold curls on one side of her head. The other eye and eyebrow and the rest of the curls Colonel Primrose had to take on faith, because of her felt hat.

She was sitting calmly there, her suede bag in her lap, studying the diagram of the Court which the attendant gives each person as he comes in.

Colonel Primrose's eye traveled along the curved benches in front of him. They were sparsely occupied by people, tourists obviously, staring about.

The hands of the white-faced clock were moving toward 12:00. The hushed silence in the room deepened. People sat forward in tense expectancy, waiting for the door behind the center chair to open. Abruptly the deputy marshal's gavel pounded a single stroke. People scrambled to their feet. The deputy marshal's sonorous voice intoned, "The Chief Justice and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States."

The Chief Justice, tall, portly, clean-shaven, with stern thin lips contradicted by a pair of twinkling blue eyes, moved into the silent room, followed by the Associate Justices.

"Oyez and oyez and oyez!" cried the deputy marshal. "All per-

sons having business before the Honorable the Supreme Court of the United States are admonished to draw near and give their attention, for the Court is now sitting. God save the United States and this honorable Court."

As they sat down, not nine ordinary men in black silk, but nine august figures, beyond passion and prejudice, on their brows the majesty and wisdom of the Law, the clerk rose and called a name. One by one five men came forward, each bringing another man with him to sponsor for practice before the Court. The five new members filed to the clerk's desk, took the oath droned out to them, and departed with their sponsors.

The spectators' benches began to empty.

"No wonder," Colonel Primrose thought. He remembered that Monday was the day the justices read their opinions.

"Report on Case Thirty-five," said the Chief Justice. His voice was clear and deep.

"No report."

"Forty-five?"

"No report."

"Case Number Two."

Colonel Primrose, agreeably surprised that there were no justices' reports, leaned forward. The girl in the blue-colored dress leaned forward too. Colonel Primrose, glancing about the room, saw two young men come in through the marshal's door, and saw them both look across the room as if they knew that the girl in blue would be there. She smiled quickly. The young men sat down by the marshal's door.

Colonel Primrose looked down at the two men in morning coats who had taken their places at the counsel table. Having taken the pains to get an excellent description of Thomas Pomeroy, he had no trouble in picking him out—the tall burly man with heavy shoulders and a pink shiny dome fringed with snowy-white hair. The other man, with the thick sandy hair that looked like a cap, and the sharp mobile face, would be Jerome Givler, partner in the law firm of Pomeroy, Knapp & Givler. He was sitting in the chair nearest the end of the table while Pomeroy spoke.

Colonel Primrose fastened his eyes on the two buttons at the tail of Thomas Pomeroy's coat and waited patiently. The few spectators who remained were beginning to leave. Colonel Primrose suddenly remembered that the ceiling was felt-lined, and that was why it was impossible to hear anyone whose back was turned to-

ward you.

He glanced about the room. Nine men remained inside the enclosure; including the clerk, the marshal, and Garrow, the court detective. Ten people, not counting himself and Sergeant Buck and the girl in the blue dress, were left on the public benches. Colonel Primrose's eyes wandered back to the big bald-headed man who was talking.

He shook his head. "Narrow squeak," he thought.

He leaned over toward his granite-faced sergeant, who was following the lead of the Chief Justice and four of the Associate Justices in stifling a gigantic yawn.

"That's Pomeroy talking," he whispered. "Lucky devil!"

Sergeant Buck suppressed his yawn abruptly, blinked, stiffened to attention, and looked puzzled.

"He'd planned to come down in that plane," Colonel Primrose whispered. "Just missed it. His daughter, too. That's probably her." He indicated the girl in the blue dress. "I don't see Mrs. Ellis."

"I read she's at the White House for lunch, sir."

Colonel Primrose nodded. Hilda Ellis, the noted woman flyer, and Thomas Pomeroy's niece, had also had a narrow squeak. The plane that Colonel Primrose had seen on Friday had crashed afame into a marsh eight miles south of Bordentown.

Colonel Primrose looked again at the broad morning-coated back in front of him and glanced up at the clock. It was 12:40. The plaintiff—the Burton-Savage Steel Company—had been allowed one hour to speak. Two women farther along on the bench began to edge toward the end of it. The hands of the clock moved slowly. It was 12:41. The two women edged farther along and made a dash for it. Sergeant Buck heaved a vast sigh and looked ostentatiously at the gigantic silver watch he carried in his vest pocket. Colonel Primrose smiled slightly. It was 12:42.

Colonel Primrose often thought later of those last few minutes. He remembered glancing at the girl to his left and seeing that the young man with the light hair and the slow cheerful grin had joined her. He remembered looking back, then, toward the marshal's door, to his right, and seeing that the short thick-set young man was still sitting there. And he remembered glancing up a last time at the clock in the gallery railing.

It was 12:44, and the minute hand of the clock was inexorably moving, not figuratively, but literally and actually, toward sud-

den death.

Then it happened, suddenly and simply. There was a deafening report, a spurt of flame from the center of the gallery. A circling cloud of bluish smoke rolled gently up to the ceiling. A woman screamed.

Sergeant Buck sprang to his feet, and Colonel Primrose, rising slowly, saw Thomas Pomeroy clutch both hands to his heart, lurch forward onto his desk, and slide heavily off it to the floor.

Before the instant of appalled and deadly silence had come to an end Colonel Primrose was halfway to the bench.

"The gallery, Buck!" he said sharply. "The stairs through that door!"

As Sergeant Buck disappeared through the marshal's door in giant strides Colonel Primrose turned to the bench.

"Keep back, gentlemen!" he said. "Keep underneath the gallery—that shot came from there."

The silence came abruptly to an end as the clamor of excited and frightened voices broke out.

The Chief Justice rose from his chair. "Order, order!" he said curtly. "Sit down, please. Keep your places!"

Colonel Primrose's sharp black eyes went from one end of the gallery to the other. There was no movement there. He saw Mr. Justice Pettijohn lean over and speak hurriedly to the Chief Justice. Then someone pushed past him. It was the girl in the blue dress.

She knelt by the inert form on the floor. The man with the fine, sharply drawn face, Jerome Givler, rose suddenly, as if he had been released by her act from the spell cast by the incredible event, and knelt also.

"Keep your places, please!" the Chief Justice said evenly. He was still standing. "Colonel Primrose, Mr. Pettijohn has told me who you are. You will take charge, please."

The door at the right end of the gallery burst open. Sergeant Buck strode through it and stopped dead in his tracks. Colonel Primrose waited, wondering.

"There's nobody here, sir!" Buck said. He strode into the center of the gallery and bent down to the clock. Then Colonel Primrose understood.

"Don't touch it, Buck!" he said sharply. He turned quickly. Garrow, the court detective, was standing by the main entrance, staring open-mouthed.

"Lock that door," Colonel Primrose said. "Mr. Marshal, see that no one leaves this room. Call the Capitol police at once and have them close the entire building. Call Captain Brady of the Metropolitan Police. Get hold of a doctor."

He went toward the bench and stared up to the left of the clock on the gallery rail. He was looking up at the blue muzzle of a revolver, visible through the decorative iron ring in the railing, still pointing with deadly accuracy at a spot just above the counsel's table, and at the exact middle of the speaker's desk—where Thomas Pomeroy's heart had been two minutes before. Colonel Primrose looked down to the floor. For days the wide tragic eyes of the girl in blue haunted him.

He knelt beside the lawyer's body. The marshal took his fingers off the limp pulse and shook his head. Colonel Primrose looked around. The court detective was keeping back the young man who had been sitting with the girl. Colonel Primrose beckoned to him and motioned toward the girl. He nodded, bent down, and lifted her gently to her feet. She let him lead her out of the silent room.

Five minutes later the justices had filed out of the room, Captain May of the Capitol police had closed all doors of the National Capitol, and the marshal of the Supreme Court had stationed men at all the entrances to the chamber. Colonel Primrose looked about. Sergeant Buck was still waiting rigidly in the low gallery, the attendants and spectators were in their places. Colonel Primrose looked puzzled.

There were two changes in the order of the room, apart from the justices; and for a moment he could not think what one of them was. The girl, of course—Pomeroy's daughter—was not in her seat. Suddenly Colonel Primrose remembered. The leather-cushioned niche to the left of the main entrance was now empty. When Colonel Primrose had come in, it was occupied by the dark, foreign-looking man in the corduroy suit.

He turned to Captain May.

"When I came in here," he said, "there was a man sitting there. He left shortly before the shot was fired, or after it."

He gave Captain May a description.

"Now I want you to get all these people out of the room. Take 'em across the corridor, put 'em somewhere, take their names and addresses. And don't let anybody get up in that gallery."

When the room was empty except for the court attendants, Colonel Primrose turned to the marshal. "I wish you'd help the

Capitol police to see that no one goes into the gallery. There's only the one exit from it, of course?"

The marshal nodded. "Just the staircase coming down in the hall there."

Captain Brady of the Metropolitan Police came in, followed by five men in plain clothes. He was stocky, thick-shouldered, and bald-headed, with a red face and bushy eyebrows.

"What's up, Colonel?" he said gruffly.

There was no need for Colonel Primrose to point to the body lying on the floor. He pointed up to the revolver muzzle and explained briefly what had happened. Brady whistled softly.

The police surgeon rose. "Got him straight through the heart," he said. "Death was instantaneous. Pretty heavy shot."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"The revolver is secured up in the railing," he said. "The counsel speaking has to stand here—you see the chairs on either side of him. He can't stand or move anywhere else. Somebody must have known just when he'd be standing there. The revolver is probably timed by that clock, with an electric device to fire it."

Captain Brady looked down and up. He took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and outlined the inert figure on the red and green carpet.

"Get a shot of the whole works," he said to his photographer. "Then you boys get him out of here. On the quiet—see?.. Let's have a look, Colonel," he said.

They crossed the room and went through the double door at the right into a narrow curved passage. It led at the left to a room that Colonel Primrose knew was the office of the Attorney General. At the right end was a lavatory and a narrow flight of iron steps running to the gallery. Across the passage was the marshal's room and its outer office.

They went along the hall and mounted the iron steps. On a landing at the top, littered with stacks of dusty pamphlets, a Capitol policeman was standing guard. They passed him. Colonel Primrose, opening the door, was startled to see that the marshal had preceded them. He was looking silently down with Sergeant Buck at the railing by the clock. The gallery was quite narrow. Cheap wood chairs with straw seats were stacked against the gallery rail. There was a door at the opposite end.

The four men looked silently down for an instant at the deadly mechanism in front of them. The back of the clock was pried open

half an inch. A tiny wire ran from inside it to a small coil neatly tied to the leg of a chair. A second wire ran from the coil to the trigger of a .45 automatic, wedged in between two chairs and firmly secured with ordinary staple wire. A weight dangled toward the carpet, from the trigger. The shank of the revolver extended downward, the muzzle still resting, as Colonel Primrose had seen from below, in an iron ring of the railing.

"Neat," said Captain Brady. "The hand of the clock completes the circuit and releases the weight. The weight pulls the trigger any time you want it to."

"Most ingenious," said the marshal.

"Well," Captain Brady said, "one thing's sure. The man we're looking for is a mechanic, and a good one. Buck, go down, will you, and bring McLaren up."

He turned to the marshal. "Who can get up here? I mean, who do you allow up here?"

"The personnel of the Court only," said the marshal promptly.

"Yeah? Who's that?"

"That includes myself and the deputy marshal, the clerk and the deputy clerk, the librarian, Mr. Tupper, the secretarial force, the messengers and other court attendants, and of course the justices."

Captain Brady shook his head ironically.

"Nobody but just them," he said heavily. "Just a crowd of a hundred or so, eh?"

"Not actually, as it works out. You see, the Court chamber is locked at 4:30, and opened at 9:00 in the morning. There are always several messengers in the office downstairs. Anyone coming in and going out would be under observation."

"You mean," Brady demanded, "that nobody could get up those stairs without being seen?"

"Precisely. I don't see how it would be possible."

"Well," Brady said shortly, "I'd like to hear you explain all this contraption." He pointed down at the revolver. "An expert mechanic would take an hour to fix this."

The marshal shrugged. "I can't explain it, Captain. But I know this: there are invariably three or four of the Court attendants in that hall, or in my outer office, through the whole day."

"In other words, Mr. Marshal," Colonel Primrose said, "whoever came up here must have been so well known to the Court attendants that they didn't think anything at all about it."

The marshal met his gaze.

"That is simply unthinkable."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I suppose it is," he said slowly. "And yet... There's another point, too. Even an expert mechanic could not do this job in a few minutes. Is there any time of the day in which somebody could be sure he wouldn't be interrupted here, for half an hour, say?"

The marshal shook his head decidedly. "It's utterly impossible, sir. Even when the Court is not sitting, there are always people down there. It's quite inconceivable."

"Well," Captain Brady said, "it's certain somebody *did* it *some* time. Is that the only way you can get up here?"

"That's the only way."

Brady pointed to the door at the left.

"That's the cedar closet, Captain," said the marshal.

Brady strode over and flung the door open. The small room was empty.

Garrow's voice came up from below. "The Chief Justice wants to see you, Colonel, as soon as you can come."

Brady said, "I'll look around, and I'll question the people who were here."

Colonel Primrose nodded and went out. The guard sitting on a pile of pamphlets tied together with a cord got to his feet.

"I understood your orders were not to let anybody up here?" Colonel Primrose said politely.

"Yes, sir. I haven't let anybody up."

Colonel Primrose smiled and went on down the stairway.

Garrow was waiting for him in the chamber. "They're in the robing room."

The Chief Justice and the Associate Justices were seated at the long table at the end of the narrow room. Colonel Primrose took the chair indicated by the Chief Justice.

"Mr. Pomeroy was shot by a revolver wired to the gallery railing and timed, by a connection with the clock, to fire at 12:45, sir," he said.

Colonel Primrose smiled a little at the look of incredulity on the faces of the nine justices before him.

"It is obviously a very unusual affair," he said. "Of course, the first question is, why was Pomeroy killed in the Supreme Court chamber, in such a complicated way, when normally it would have been so much easier to do it elsewhere?"

Mr. Justice Eldon leaned forward. "We may take it that the bullet was not intended for any member of the Court?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"To all appearances it was intended for someone at the counsel's desk, sir. If an attack on the Court was intended, it would have been equally simple for the criminal to have put a bomb in the gallery."

"What do the police think?" Mr. Justice Field asked. His voice crackled.

"No conclusion yet, sir. It's an incredible affair, really. There seem to be no fingerprints or footprints. The mystery, of course, is how anyone could have got up there, unnoticed, and had the time, uninterrupted, to install the revolver."

He turned to the Chief Justice.

"You gentlemen were facing the courtroom, sir," he said. "Did any of you notice anything unusual?"

Mr. Justice Taggert, at the end of the table, leaned forward.

"It was my impression that Pomeroy seemed nervous," he said slowly.

Mr. Justice Eldon smiled faintly. "I was under the impression," he said, "that Pomeroy was exceptionally composed—particularly when compared to last Friday."

Mr. Justice Horton spoke. "I agree with Mr. Taggert," he said. "I thought, furthermore, that Givler was quite unlike himself. In fact, I recall thinking they both were upset, as if they had quarreled." He smiled at Mr. Justice Eldon. "I also recall seeing the man sitting at the right center, by the entrance, leave the room hastily, just after the shot. I also saw a very pretty girl in the audience—which is certainly a deviation from the normal."

Mr. Justice Maybin smiled. "It is," he said. "At least, it is unusual for them to remain any time. But . . ." He turned to Mr. Justice Horton. "But as I recall it, the man in the niche by the entrance surely left the Court *before* the shot."

Colonel Primrose turned to Mr. Justice Oneal, who shook his fine head. "I remember the girl," he said slowly. "I don't recall seeing anyone leave the Court, near the time of the shot."

Mr. Justice Pettijohn nodded. "I saw the girl, too," he said. "My secretary, John Herrick, was with her."

Mr. Justice Pettijohn smiled dryly. "It was my impression that Givler was decidedly nervous, and that Pomeroy was almost unusually composed."

"And the man by the entrance, sir?"

Mr. Justice Pettijohn shook his head. "I didn't notice the man." Colonel Primrose bowed and turned to the Chief Justice.

"And you, sir?"

Mr. Chief Justice Randolph shook his head. "I saw the man leave," he said. "I have no idea whether it was before or after the shot."

Colonel Primrose looked from one end of the table to the other. He chuckled a little. The Chief Justice's fine eyes lighted.

"We have the nine justices of the Supreme Court as eyewitnesses of a murder," he said. "And the only point on which they agree is that there was a pretty girl in the room. I am afraid, Colonel Primrose, that we are poor witnesses."

Colonel Primrose's eyes twinkled. "There probably wasn't much to witness, sir," he said politely. "I doubt, as a matter of fact, if the man who went out had any connection."

Mr. Justice Horton nodded. "Doesn't the fact that the revolver was so placed and timed indicate that probably the murderer was not present at all?"

Colonel Primrose nodded. "Very likely, sir. But for that very reason it would be a smart thing for him to be there. Or...he may have had to be there."

"In any case," Mr. Justice Maybin said gently, "a very accurate knowledge of the Court procedure is indicated?"

Colonel Primrose nodded again. "Our field is narrowed by that and other points," he said. "We already know a good deal about the murderer. One: he had access to the gallery. That in itself should narrow the field greatly. Two: he had enough knowledge of mechanics and electricity to attach the revolver in the gallery. Three: for some reason, he had the time to do it in. Four: he had an intimate enough knowledge of the Supreme Court procedure to know that his victim would be standing on that spot at that time. Even with a substantial field of error, that bullet would still have been fatal. Now, Pomeroy, I should think, is an unusually tall man. That seems to me to point to the fact that Pomeroy was certainly the intended victim. For instance, the shot could hardly have been intended for Givler."

Mr. Justice Oneal spoke up. "I think you are right, Colonel Primrose. I know Jerome Givler a little. You may not have noticed that his legs are grotesquely short. The top of his head would not come to Pomeroy's shoulder."

"Could the murderer have aimed at Givler's head?" the Chief Justice asked.

"I think you can count that out, sir. The chances of missing would be too great. A counsel's body hardly moves as he stands there, but his head does. He looks from side to side, he looks down at his notes, perhaps."

Colonel Primrose lapsed into silence for a moment. He came to with a little start.

"*I beg your pardon, sir,*" he said apologetically. "I just thought of something." He got to his feet.

"We shall expect you to follow through," Mr. Chief Justice Randolph said. He rose and held out his hand...

Sergeant Buck was waiting in the hall.

"Miss Pomeroy's downstairs, sir. They tell me she won't go till she sees you."

Anne Pomeroy was standing in the library of the Supreme Court. The dark young man with the suave manner and the blue-shaven cheeks was with her. He came forward as Colonel Primrose and Sergeant Buck entered.

"Sterrett Conrad is my name," he said. There was a slight touch of arrogance in his manner that Colonel Primrose instantly disliked. "I'm Mr. Justice Taggart's secretary, and Miss Pomeroy's an old friend of mine. Anne, this is Colonel Primrose."

Colonel Primrose took the girl's hand.

"Why didn't you go to your hotel?" he asked gently.

"I had to know about Dad," she said.

A quiet, compelling voice behind them made Colonel Primrose turn quickly. "It was an accident, Anne," the voice said.

Thomas Pomeroy's partner was standing in the door. The man had the head and torso of a six-footer on legs so unequal to them that he must have been a full three inches shorter than Colonel Primrose, and Colonel Primrose's figure was less than average height. Under Jerome Givler's thatch of hair and shaggy brows a pair of gray eyes as sharp as steel were fixed on the girl.

"There's no reason to think otherwise," he added quietly.

Anne Pomeroy shrank unconsciously as she turned questioning, bewildered eyes to Colonel Primrose.

"That's possible," he said. "But I'm afraid what little evidence we have seems to point to a deliberate plot against your father's life."

Givler sat down.

"You'll see how absurd that is, Colonel, when I tell you that it was definitely understood by everybody concerned that *I* was to open the case this morning—not Pomeroy. I had expected to do so until eleven o'clock. If that shot was meant for anyone, it was meant for me."

Colonel Primrose was about to speak, when voices sounded outside.

"It's all right, Mr. Tupper," a man's voice said breezily. "This is Miss Pomeroy's cousin."

Colonel Primrose felt a sudden tensing of the atmosphere. Conrad moved away from Anne Pomeroy. Jerome Givler's piercing eyes lighted. Anne looked away, suddenly tired and shadowy. Colonel Primrose watched her.

A slim lovely woman in a smart tweed suit and suede hat swept lightly into the room and took the girl in her arms. "Oh, Anne dear!" she said softly. For a moment Anne Pomeroy's head drooped on Hilda Ellis' shoulder; then she turned away quickly and stared out the window.

Mrs. Ellis turned, her soft dark eyes wet with tears. Colonel Primrose, who had seen the famous woman flyer in a hundred newspaper pictures, had never realized that she was also a beautiful woman.

"This is Mrs. Ellis, Colonel Primrose," John Herrick, who accompanied her, said proudly. "Hilda Ellis, you know."

Colonel Primrose took the cool brown hand and looked curiously into the delicately live face of the celebrated aviatrix, whose plans to fly to Tokyo via the North Pole were on the front pages. He could readily understand the quickening light in Jerome Givler's eyes and Anne Pomeroy's suddenly flagging spirits. John Herrick's infatuation was distressingly obvious. It was Conrad he could not make out. He was so concerned with the business of lighting a cigarette that he had hardly nodded, and as Mrs. Ellis moved away from Anne Pomeroy he went closer to her. Colonel Primrose heard him say, "Steady, old girl!" and saw her quick grateful smile.

"Can't she go now?" Hilda Ellis said.

Anne said, "I'm staying, Hilda. Until I find out what's happened."

"Anne, I told you it was an accident," Givler said with a sort of sharp patience.

"But I...oh, don't you see? So many things have happened. I feel..." She stopped.

"What do you mean, Miss Pomeroy?" Colonel Primrose asked.

"She doesn't mean anything," Givler said coldly. "She's upset—was already, when she came here this morning."

He cast a glance of resentment at John Herrick.

"This has just been too much for her. I'm her guardian until she's twenty-one. I demand that she be allowed to go."

Mrs. Ellis smiled coolly.

"She's not a child," she said. "She has a right to stay. After all, this isn't very usual, Jerome. I'll take the responsibility."

Givler's eyes flickered angrily.

"Please, my dear!" Mrs. Ellis said softly. "Don't make it so hard for everybody."

He bowed. "I'm sorry," he said.

Colonel Primrose's black eyes shone with interest. It was a scene after his own heart. Professionally considered, it was in such scenes, alive with cross-purposes and submerged passions, that the dark backgrounds of such affairs came to light.

"When did Mr. Pomeroy come to Washington?" he asked.

"Thursday on the Limited," Mrs. Ellis said. "We were going to take the Thompson line plane down. It was the one that crashed. We just missed it."

Her clear face clouded. "That's what you meant, honey?"

Anne nodded.

John Herrick interrupted. "Listen, Anne!" he said urgently. "It was just an accident."

Conrad spoke suddenly. "Does it seem quite intelligent," he said, "to assume that somebody planted a timed gun up there just for fun, with nobody particularly in mind?"

Herrick flushed. "You know yourself, Sterrett, that nobody can time anything in the Supreme Court."

"Why not?" said Colonel Primrose.

"Because it just wouldn't work. This is Monday, and Monday is opinion day. The Court sits at twelve, the new lawyers are sworn in, the opinions are read. Nobody ever knows how long that'll take. Even if they did, unless a case is held over you can't *know* you're going to open, even if you're next on the docket."

"How long do those preliminaries usually take?" Colonel Primrose asked.

"Oh, fifteen minutes to swear in the new talent. The opinions

depend. Just now the reports made up in the summer have been done and there aren't any new ones."

"Which nearly everyone knows," Colonel Primrose said quietly. "And the present case *was* held over from last Friday. Furthermore, the plaintiff had been allowed one hour. Wouldn't it seem to you, therefore, that anyone familiar with the procedure of the Court would naturally figure out 12:45 as a pretty sure time to have the man who opened that case standing there at counsel's table?"

Herrick looked silently at him. Then he nodded. "You're right," he said.

"Then let's get on," said Colonel Primrose. "Who, for instance, did you understand would open the case?"

"Oh, Pomeroy, of course," Herrick said. "He always opens such cases. And he told me he was going to, last night."

Jerome Givler spoke up sharply. "You must have misunderstood," he said. "It was definitely agreed that I was to open. You remember yesterday afternoon, Hilda, when I left you upstairs, I told you that?"

"I remember it, Jerome," she said. "And you remember I told you that I had to go to the White House. And, anyway, I spent so many centuries in that room when I was a child, listening to my father talking about meat packers and antitrust laws, that I don't think I'll ever be able to bear it again."

Colonel Primrose gave her a nod. His own father had been a clergyman.

"Of course, I hadn't realized that," Givler said stiffly. He turned abruptly to Herrick. His eyes gleamed furiously.

"I presume you got your information from Mr. Pomeroy last night?"

"Yes."

"I presume further that you would prefer to skip the rest of that interview?"

Herrick flushed again. "It happens that it's nobody else's business."

"Yes?" Givler said. "I should think Colonel Primrose might be interested in knowing that Pomeroy regarded your behavior as insulting and withdrew our offer of a position in the firm."

"That's not true," said Herrick coolly. He hesitated a moment and glanced at Anne Pomeroy. "I told him I *wouldn't* go into your firm if he made me senior partner."

Mrs. Ellis' cool voice cut in gently. "Now, now," she said. "Please!"

The two men stared silently at each other across the table.

"What can you tell us, Mrs. Ellis?" Colonel Primrose asked pleasantly.

She shook her head. "I've known my uncle only a short time." She smiled suddenly. "In fact, only since I've been on the front page, to be exact."

"That's not quite fair, Hilda," Jerome Givler said quickly. "You never gave anyone a chance to know you."

"I gave Uncle Tom a beautiful chance, Jerome. I gave him the chance to lend me a thousand dollars my last year in college. He declined. It wasn't till I got my name in the papers that he remembered I was the only daughter of his only brother."

Colonel Primrose got up.

"Well, that's all now," he said. "You might stay a moment, Mr. Givler."

"I will return after I've taken Mrs. Ellis and Miss Pomeroy to their hotel," Givler said stiffly.

"Don't bother," John Herrick said cheerfully. "I've got my car outside."

Givler's face turned red. When they had gone he turned to Colonel Primrose.

"He hasn't left her alone five minutes since she came, Thursday," he said in a choked voice. "I don't see how she can endure it."

"He seems to be a rather attractive young fellow," Colonel Primrose said.

"Young enough to be her son. At least there's a large difference in their ages. She's thirty-five."

John Herrick, Colonel Primrose reflected, must be all of twenty-eight.

"Tell me about Pomeroy," he said. "Was he a wealthy man?"

"He was worth eight hundred thousand dollars," said Givler. "Free of encumbrance. It goes entirely to his daughter, under my guardianship and trusteeship until she is twenty-one. She is nineteen."

Colonel Primrose looked at him for a moment. Then he took a shot in the dark.

"Is it true, Mr. Givler, that your relations with Pomeroy have been badly strained recently?"

Givler looked at him. "I am not a man to bluff, Colonel Primrose," he said stiffly. He hesitated a moment. "But I think in this case the truth will be the safest."

Some minutes later the burly form of Sergeant Buck loomed heavily in the doorway. Colonel Primrose got up. "Thank you," he said. "I'll see you again."

He went outside with Buck.

"The captain's in the marshal's office, sir. He says they've got the guy."

"Have they?" Colonel Primrose said. His eyes twinkled. "Well, let's see him."

They went upstairs.

Knowing Brady, Colonel Primrose was fully prepared for the scene before him. Brady sat, tight-lipped and iron-jawed, at a table with Captain May of the Capitol police. Across from them was a cadaverous man with unkempt black hair, wearing a solid gray flannel shirt and a brown corduroy suit. He was the man who had sat in the niche to Colonel Primrose's right and who had slipped out of the chamber either before or after the shot was fired. And he was terrified.

"You say your name is Heinrich Flack?"

The man nodded.

"Your occupation?"

He hesitated and shook his head. "*Nicht verstehe.*"

"You're German? Deutsch?"

"Ja, I speak no English."

"Let's see your passport."

Heinrich Flack looked blank.

Colonel Primrose made the request in German. The man shrugged and made a sullen reply in that language.

"Unfortunately," Colonel Primrose translated, "he has lost his passport."

"Yeah?" said Captain Brady. "Isn't that interesting? Ask him what he does for a living, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose did so.

"Mechaniker," said Flack. There was no need to translate that.

"You're a mechanic, are you?" Brady said. His eyes caught Colonel Primrose's in the mirror over the marshal's fireplace. Colonel Primrose shook his head a little. Brady turned to the detective standing at the door.

"Take him to headquarters," he said. "Hold him as an undesirable alien."

Colonel Primrose slipped through the door into the outer office. There was no use, he thought, in arguing now with Brady that the shooting of Thomas Pomeroy was the work not only of someone familiar with mechanics, but also of someone thoroughly familiar with the operation of the Supreme Court.

He turned into the Supreme Court chamber. His chief concern for the time being was sorting out and getting clearly in mind what he had learned during the half hour spent with Anne Pomeroy and the others. He had two sets of information, one arrived at by means of his eyes and his ears, the other learned from Jerome Givler.

The first set included:

1. Jerome Givler was passionately in love with Hilda Ellis, the airwoman.

2. John Herrick was in the same condition already, or was rapidly becoming so.

3. Mrs. Ellis was not in love with either of them.

4. Anne Pomeroy was in love with Herrick.

5. Givler had, or pretended to have, some idea the shot was intended for him.

6. Pomeroy and John Herrick had quarreled about something so serious as to make Herrick give up a berth that most young lawyers would have jumped at.

7. Givler was a vain, conceited, quick-tempered man.

In the second set Colonel Primrose put the information, true or false, that he had got from Givler after the others had left.

1. Pomeroy was worth \$800,000.

2. It was left entirely to his daughter.

3. It was left in trust until her twenty-first birthday. She was now nineteen. Givler was both trustee and guardian.

4. Pomeroy had been in trouble in 1929 through personally diverting a fund of \$90,000 placed in his care. He had recovered his losses and restored the fund, narrowly escaping jail.

5. Givler was the only person who knew.

6. Givler had expected to open their case in the Supreme Court until eleven o'clock Monday morning, when Pomeroy had calmly told him that he would do it.

7. They had several times recently considered dissolving the partnership.

Colonel Primrose thought it over until Sergeant Buck, standing rigidly behind him, coughed significantly. Colonel Primrose looked around.

"You want action, Buck, don't you?" he said. "Well, let's see Brady again."

"He's gone back to the station, sir."

"Right. Let's go there."

At the door of the Indiana Avenue station Colonel Primrose hesitated. "Buck," he said, "go to the Ritz. Ask Mrs. Ellis if she can leave Miss Pomeroy long enough to dine with us tonight."

Sergeant Buck's iron lips tightened.

"At home, sir?"

"I think it will be all right, Buck—just this once."

"Right, sir."

Colonel Primrose watched him go down to the car, the ramrod down his back more inflexible than he had ever seen it.

"Odd how Buck manages to make me feel like an old roué," he said to Brady when he had gone up in the rickety elevator to the office. "All in the line of duty too. Well, what do you think?"

"It's a mystery to me, Colonel. McLaren says that job—planting the gun there that way—would take a pretty good mechanic more than half an hour. It'd take an amateur mechanic, say, more like an hour. He'd need some wire, a pair of pliers, the coil, the gun, a dry cell, and a weight. They're all easy to get anywhere."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"We've questioned everybody in the Capitol. Nobody's seen anything. The Supreme Court was locked at 4:30 Friday. Saturday the bar was put up so people could look in, but there was a guard in the corridor all day. The marshal's staff was on duty same as ever."

"What about your foreigner?"

"We'll see. Pomeroy was counsel to the Alien Deportation Commission last year."

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "It's going to be harder than that, Brady," he said. "For instance: Givler himself tells me that up to eleven o'clock Monday it was planned that he'd open the case."

Captain Brady was silent a moment. "Who knew they'd made the change?"

"Herrick, for one. We'll have to find out who else. But, above all, we've got to get at the motive—and the matter of opportunity."

Brady groaned. "Nobody could possibly have got up there and stayed up there all that time without being seen. It's downright impossible, Colonel!"

Colonel Primrose smiled grimly. "This noon, when I came out of that gallery, I asked the guard there if his orders weren't to let nobody up. He said they were and he hadn't. But he had, Brady. He'd let the marshal up."

Brady scowled. "So what?"

"Simply this," Colonel Primrose said gravely. "Those people are all so accustomed to seeing each other all over the Court that they just don't notice each other, or even remember afterwards."

Brady pushed back his chair. "I get you," he said. "Colonel, I'd hate to find out the Chief Justice was apprenticed to an electrician when he was a boy."

Colonel Primrose chuckled.

"Did McLaren say anything about the time the gun was set up?"

"Any time after 12:45 last night," Brady said moodily. "The hour hand getting there completed the circuit. So that puts it between nine and twelve this morning. The place is locked till then."

Colonel Primrose looked at him a moment. "I suppose you're right." He reached for his hat. "Who is the president of the Women's Defense League?"

"I think it's Mrs. Pettijohn."

Colonel Primrose took the morning paper from the desk and turned to the second section.

"Society page, Colonel?" Brady asked.

"Exactly. Here we are: 'Society turned out yesterday to the annual meeting of the W.D.L.' And so on. 'Most brilliant meeting ever held under the Capitol dome,' Brady. Hm. Ever been to one of these shindigs? They lock the common herd out and turn over the works to the girls, and they make speeches and make an educational tour of the Capitol Building. They take in the House, Senate, Supreme Court chamber, and the view from the dome.

"Let's see. 'Among those present'...and so on. Here we are, Brady: 'Mr. Justice Pettijohn and Mrs. Pettijohn, president of the league. Thomas Pomeroy, of New York and Southampton, whose niece is the famous airwoman, Hilda Pomeroy Ellis. Mrs. Ellis was awarded the league's medal for the most distinguished contribution to female aviation.'"

Captain Brady grunted. "All that get you anywhere, Colonel?"  
"Probably not," Colonel Primrose said.

Some minutes later he lifted the polished brass knocker on the wide white door of Mr. Justice Pettijohn's Georgetown home. A bald-headed butler opened the door. In a moment Colonel Primrose was waiting in a room that looked, as apparently the whole house did, completely and uncompromisingly mid-Victorian. In another moment he heard the deep voice of the president of the Women's Defense League.

"How d'y'e do, Colonel Primrose?"

A large woman with piled snow-white hair and a Back Bay nose held out a strong bejeweled claw.

"Sit down. Heard of you. What do you want?"

He sat down. "I want a list of the guests who attended your meeting in the Capitol yesterday."

"Want to sell 'em anything?" Mrs. Pettijohn demanded curtly.

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "No. I'm just trying to find out who was there."

"None of my business, I suppose." Mrs. Pettijohn reached for the bell-pull and yanked it vigorously. The butler appeared.

"Penn, look on my secretary. Bring the typed lists of names under the blotter." Penn left.

"Pettijohn was speaking about you. Some nonsense about you going up to investigate the wreck Julian Block was in."

"Yes. It was carrying mail. The Post Office looks into everything of that kind. Largely a formality. General Block was interested in women in aviation, I believe?"

"In women, anyway."

"I met Mrs. Ellis today."

"Nice person," said Mrs. Pettijohn. "But they'll run her to death. Had to leave before tea yesterday to get to some place or another, and today she's giving an exhibition at the Women Pilots' meeting at Bladensburg. Crash the first thing she knows."

She took the typed sheets from the butler's silver tray.

"Here you are. Want to take 'em along?"

Colonel Primrose looked down the 200 selected names. Mr. Justice Pettijohn was included. Jerome Givler was not. John Herrick had been present with his mother. There were only a few names that Colonel Primrose did not recognize.

He returned the list and rose. "Thank you," he said. "I won't need it further."

Colonel Primrose got painfully to his feet as Mrs. Ellis came radiantly into his library. He felt a vague sense of uneasiness. For one thing, Sergeant Buck's almost unctuous "Let me take your coat, ma'am," out in the hall, had indicated his complete surrender. In fact, for the first time in his life, Sergeant Buck noticed with disapproval that the room was reeking with smoke, Scotch whiskey, and the smell of old books. Mrs. Ellis, in a black velvet dinner gown with long sleeves, seemed to Buck a water lily in the middle of a brewery swamp.

"I trust Mr. Givler didn't mind your coming?" Colonel Primrose said.

Hilda Ellis laughed outright.

"I'm afraid I didn't mention it to him."

"And Mr. Herrick?"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Don't tell me you haven't noticed his dumb devotion?"

The smile in her dark eyes died.

"Oh, that's absurd. I never saw Mr. Herrick until last Thursday night, when he came to meet Anne at the station."

"Perhaps I shouldn't have said that," Colonel Primrose said.

"But I'm glad you did. It makes several things clear to me. That accounts for Anne's complete smashup. I'm sure it never occurred to me that the sweet child thought I wanted her beau. And that probably accounts for the odd way Mr. Givler's been acting."

Colonel Primrose hesitated "I wonder if it would be very rude of me to ask if you're going to marry Mr. Givler?" he said.

"It just happens that I'm not going to marry him, or anybody else. I've had one husband, and I was devoted to him. He taught me how to fly, and he crashed—as all flyers must, some time, I suppose."

They were silent a moment. Colonel Primrose was thinking about the wrecked and blackened fragments he had seen in the New Jersey marsh.

"Won't you tell me something about Mr. Givler and your uncle?" he asked.

They were seated at the table, with Sergeant Buck hovering solid and gigantic in the background. Colonel Primrose noticed that they were using his great-great-grandmother's Waterford set. It put Mrs. Ellis in a class with the wife of the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army, who had once lunched with them.

Mrs. Ellis looked at him through the forest of silver and flame-tipped wax. "Many people have entertained me as a flyer, and a few as a woman, but I don't think I've ever been entertained as a witness before," she said laughingly. "But seriously, I can't tell you. You know almost as much about them as I do. I've seen something of Mr. Givler. He's offered to finance flights for me. But that's a case of a rose by any other name smelling as bad—if that makes sense."

"It doesn't," said Colonel Primrose. "But—forgive me. I understood Block was financing your big Tokyo flight?"

"That's a totally different matter."

Primrose smiled. "Why?"

"General Block is—was—a professional backer, so to speak. He backed lots of people. He expects to be paid back, but not to be married—or anything else. It was a business proposition."

Mrs. Ellis laughed softly. "You know, a woman flyer is dreadfully handicapped, Colonel Primrose. I mean, no matter how good you are, nobody thinks you're good enough to pilot passengers or mail planes.

"Now, I make my living flying, but it's mostly exhibition stuff, which is dangerous. I can't teach flying, because women would rather be taught by a third-rate man than a first-rate woman."

Mrs. Ellis' tone was charmingly and humorously casual.

"In fact, like all professions for women, the essential thing is a wealthy husband," she sighed.

"Which brings us back," Colonel Primrose said, with a smile, "to Mr. Givler."

"How, for heaven's sake?"

"He's probably wealthy."

"I suppose so. But he's poisonous."

"He is? Well, what about your uncle?"

Mrs. Ellis shrugged lightly. "My uncle's dead."

"What about the will?"

She smiled quickly. "That hardly concerns me."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "How did your uncle and Givler get on?"

"They didn't."

"Did the business of Givler's insisting he was supposed to open their case this morning strike you as odd?"

Hilda Ellis shook her head. "No. That was rather like my uncle. When Mr. Givler said yesterday that he was opening, and hoped

I'd be there, my uncle winked at me, and when Mr. Givler left he said, "That's what *he* thinks; but we're not taking any chances tomorrow."

Colonel Primrose looked at her for a moment. He took another shot in the dark.

"Why was your uncle opposed to a marriage between you and Mr. Givler?"

"Did he tell you that?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "It's true, though?"

She nodded. "I don't know why. He'd never say. It might be because Givler hadn't any connections. I sometimes wondered if Uncle thought he'd leave his money to Anne. But I don't know."

Colonel Primrose shook his head again, wondering a little. And then they were back in front of the fire.

"I saw Mrs. Pettijohn today," he said. "She says you skipped out on them yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Ellis flushed.

"I—I lied to her," she said contritely. "Don't tell on me. I was flying this morning at the Bladensburg exhibition and I had to get some sleep. I sneaked away before tea and went home; and I steadfastly refused to answer phone calls or anything else. Colonel Primrose, I simply *couldn't* show up at that club and talk about woman's place in the next war."

Somewhere in the deep recesses of the old house an old-fashioned bell tinkled.

For no reason that he could have named, Colonel Primrose felt a sudden tenseness. He listened intently to Sergeant Buck's heavy tread in the hall. The door opened, and a voice spoke outside.

"No, sir," Sergeant Buck said. "She ain't here... Yes, she was here to dinner, but she's gone. Half an hour ago... No, he ain't here, either."

Colonel Primrose heard the door close. Sergeant Buck came to the library door.

"A gentleman was looking for you, ma'am," he said. "Givler was the name. Said he didn't have time to come in."

Mrs. Ellis put her handkerchief suddenly to her lips. Colonel Primrose's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps in that case Mrs. Ellis will have another cup of coffee, Buck," he said.

Mrs. Ellis smiled. Colonel Primrose's gaze rested on her for an instant, and suddenly flashed past her to the garden window.

"Buck!" he said quietly.

Sergeant Buck put down the tray and turned without seeming to move. A hand on the window ledge shifted. Two eyes glittering white in the light from the room sank back into the night. Colonel Primrose struggled to rise; Sergeant Buck took one swift, gigantic step toward the door, covering the girl with his great body, just as the sharp report of a shot, the splintering crack of the window pane, and the crash of the Chippendale mirror over the mantel sounded together in the quiet night.

Sergeant Buck burst through the door; Colonel Primrose hobbled to the wall and switched off the light.

He waited a moment until he heard Buck in the garden. He snapped the light on and turned to Mrs. Ellis.

"You're not hurt?" he said quickly.

She shook her head. She was sitting quietly in the chair.

Sergeant Buck appeared in the doorway. The sleeve of his coat was torn and blood trickled slowly down his arm. Mrs. Ellis rose quickly.

"It ain't anything, ma'am," Sergeant Buck said. "He just scratched me. He got over the wall, sir. Maybe we could get him in Q Street, if you want."

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Ellis cried quickly. "Please! Let him go—I just shouldn't have come. And I'd better go now."

Colonel Primrose got up. Buck shook his head firmly. "I'll take her, sir."

For a moment Colonel Primrose hesitated. "She'll be safer, sir," Buck added.

Colonel Primrose smiled a little sadly. "Right, Buck," he said.

He stood in the door a moment, watching the sergeant and Hilda Ellis go down the steps and get into the car. Then he went back to his fire and sat there.

Some minutes later the telephone jangled. Colonel Primrose looked up, the same irrational tenseness at his heart, and took up the receiver.

"Brady speaking," said the telephone. "For God's sake, Colonel, what's going on there?"

"What do you mean?" said Colonel Primrose quickly.

"Givler's here," Captain Brady barked. "He's killed Hilda Ellis."

A sinking nausea came over Colonel Primrose. "What did you say?" he shouted, knowing well what Captain Brady had said. "Where was Buck?"

There was a moment's astounded silence.

"Buck?" said Captain Brady.

"He was with her—"

"Colonel, you've lost your mind! She was with you—in your living room."

A great wave of relief flowed over Colonel Primrose.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Well, he didn't kill her. But don't tell him. I'll be over."

Mr. Jerome Givler was sitting hunched in a chair in Brady's office. Captain Brady was standing by the window.

Colonel Primrose nodded to him. "Why did you do it?" he asked Givler quietly.

Givler sat there, painful breaths that were almost sobs breaking from his lips.

"Why did you do it?"

"I lost my head." Givler rubbed his forehead with his clenched fists as if trying to clear his brain. "I thought you... She's driven me almost crazy—it's one man after another. First Block, then this young fool Herrick, now you."

"But Pomeroy wouldn't let her marry you," Colonel Primrose said quietly.

Givler recoiled as if he had been struck.

"The ——" he said savagely. "He poisoned her mind against me. He couldn't stand to think she'd marry me. He said I was a dwarf. It's always been that way. He poisoned his wife's mind against me!"

Givler crumpled into a heap on Captain Brady's desk, his great shoulders shaken with sobs.

Colonel Primrose broke the silence.

"Did you kill Thomas Pomeroy?"

There was no reply for a moment. Then Givler raised his head. "I wish I had."

Colonel Primrose hesitated, thought a moment, and got up. Captain Brady followed him out of the office.

"He came here to give himself up?"

Brady nodded.

Colonel Primrose thought a moment.

"This is getting complicated," he said. He hesitated. "I don't think I'd hold him. Tell him he didn't hurt anybody, and let him go. Hold his gun and keep a couple of men looking after him."

"All right, Colonel. Your funeral."

Colonel Primrose looked at his watch.

"I'll meet you at the Capitol in half an hour, Brady," he said. "I want to look around there again."

Colonel Primrose smiled pleasantly to himself as he entered the basement door by the law library of the Congress. He nodded to the guard and went up the curving marble staircase. A man was sitting in the marshal's outer office. It was Mr. Tupper, the Supreme Court librarian. He got up as Colonel Primrose came in and shook his head sadly.

"It gets worse and worse, Colonel," he said.

Colonel Primrose stared.

"It does?" he said. "How?"

"You'd think a murder was enough. But they've taken some of the reports away, and I'm responsible for them."

Colonel Primrose was keenly interested.

"What reports?" he said. "Where?"

"Proceedings of the Court from October 1st to November 15th, 1933."

"You mean they were taken from the Supreme Court chamber on the day of the murder?"

Mr. Tupper nodded ruefully. "From the gallery stairs, Colonel Primrose."

Colonel Primrose thought hard. "What cases did they cover? Is there any connection?"

The librarian shook his head. "The marshal has two men looking the cases up, to see if Mr. Pomeroy was concerned. But, even then, I can't see the least point in taking them. There are other records. What would be the point?"

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"Were they on the landing, just below the gallery?" he asked. He remembered the guard sitting on a pile of pamphlets.

The librarian nodded.

"Let's have a look."

Mr. Tupper led the way. On the landing he stopped and pointed to the pamphlets stacked on the iron floor.

"We haven't much room to put things in until we move," he said.

Colonel Primrose looked down silently at them. The tops of the stacks were quite dusty, except one; and that, he remembered, was the one on which the guard had been sitting.

"You can see for yourself," said Mr. Tupper. He bent down and touched the center pile. "Somebody has untied them and taken out about twenty of them, and tied the pile up again."

Colonel Primrose looked. "I wonder," he said slowly, "where they are now."

Mr. Tupper stared at him as if he had quite lost what little reason he had ever possessed.

Colonel Primrose continued. "Don't you see that the murderer, who undoubtedly took these, had no use at all for them, except to...? I mean, they certainly are somewhere in the building. Will you get a couple of the messengers and find them?"

The librarian looked at him in silent stupefaction for a moment, then turned and went hastily down the stairs. Colonel Primrose sat down on the remaining pamphlets.

He was still sitting there when Captain Brady came up the iron stairs. Colonel Primrose nodded abstractedly and got up.

"Let's get one or two things straight," he said. "The first point about this job, Brady, is that the man who did it knew the court-room, knew Pomeroy was opening the case, knew he had a whole hour to speak in, knew he'd be speaking at 12:45."

"Provided," Captain Brady said, "that it was Pomeroy he meant to kill."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I think you can count on that. Now, here we come to the hardest part of all: he knew enough about how things go on around here to come up into this gallery and fix up a deadly device without being noticed. That's on the verge of the impossible, Brady."

Captain Brady nodded glumly.

"Because," Colonel Primrose went on methodically, "this chamber is locked and double-locked until nine o'clock in the morning. After that everyone connected with the Court can come in. I'm not talking about their being able to fix up that revolver, but just about their being around here. Now, whom does that include?"

"The justices," said Brady sardonically.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "The marshal, the deputy marshal, the librarian, the secretaries, the stenographers, the Attorney General's staff, the messengers, and the pages. That's the lot. We start off looking for somebody who's familiar with this Court; and we add that he's familiar with firearms and mechanics. Now, if you were fixing up a revolver in that way, what would you have

o bring into this gallery?"

"A gun," said Brady. "A coil, a dry cell, some wire, a weight, and a pair of pliers."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "What would you bring them in?"

Brady stared suddenly. "By gosh, Colonel, you've got it! A brief case, of course!"

Colonel Primrose nodded again.

"That could do it," he said. "In a place like this what would be less noticed? Everyone carries one. Now, let's say it was a brief case. Suppose you'd been up here for an hour—and how you could do it I can't tell you to save my life, but suppose you had—and you didn't want anyone to realize it when you came down. What would you do?"

Brady stared at him for a moment. Then he said, "I'd carry something out that made it seem as if I'd come up for it."

Colonel Primrose pointed to the stack of pamphlets on the floor.

"Fifteen or so of these documents are missing," he said. "The murderer fixed his trap here, tucked the Court records from October 1st to November 15th, 1933, under his arm, taking the intelligent pains to get them from the middle so there'd still be dust left on top, and calmly walked out with them. And nobody noticed him at all."

Brady chewed his cigar. "Narrows it down, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose looked soberly at him. "Does it, or doesn't it?" he said. "Well, what you've got to do is this: take everybody round this place, find out if they know anything about electricity and mechanics, get their pictures, and take them around to every electrical shop in Washington. And what about the gun?"

"It's an old army type. Thousands of 'em around."

"What about Givler's gun?"

"He bought it this afternoon, to protect himself from his enemies—or that's his story. He ought to know plenty about guns, Colonel. He's a member of the Westchester Trapshooters Association."

Colonel Primrose looked up at him. "He is?" he said. He was a little puzzled. "He missed that girl at fifteen feet."

"I guess his nerves were all shot."

Colonel Primrose sat down on the pile of pamphlets and was silent for a moment.

"Well, let's get along," he said.

At the foot of the stairs they met the marshal coming out of his anteroom.

"Ah," Colonel Primrose said. "Can you let us into the chamber for a moment?"

In the Supreme Court room he wandered off by himself toward the gallery, behind the justices' bench. He was vaguely disturbed as people are when something lies at the back of their heads, refusing to take shape and clarify itself.

It was shortly after nine the next morning that Sergeant Buck presented himself in the library doorway. He cleared his throat nervously and Colonel Primrose shot him an irritated glance. Then he put down his pen.

"Well, Buck!" he said. "A wedding, or a White House reception?"

Sergeant Buck's granite face flushed sheepishly. He smoothed down his best suit and brushed a highly imaginary speck from the band of his dove-gray hat. He cleared his throat again.

"If it's all right with you, sir," he said formally, "I'd thought I'd shoffer Mrs. Ellis around this morning, in case that guy starts shooting again. I mean, she's got to go to a couple of places this morning, and if you wasn't using the car, and it was all right with you, I just thought, if it was all right..."

"It is," said Colonel Primrose. "Be careful, Buck."

Sergeant Buck's face flushed still more deeply. "I don't know what you're driving at, sir."

Colonel Primrose chuckled. "I mean, be careful somebody doesn't take another shot at you."

He turned back to his work, smiling a little as he thought how much he would like to see Hilda Ellis' face when she saw Sergeant Buck in his best suit.

It was shortly after eleven when he got out of a taxi at the Ritz. On the sixth floor he knocked at the door of the Pomeroy's suite. Sterrett Conrad opened the door.

"Come in, sir," he said.

Anne Pomeroy was sitting curled up at the end of the sofa. She smiled at him and got up. "Hello," she said. "Sterrett, you'd better come back later."

Mr. Conrad looked from one to the other. There was a little air of possessive arrogance about him.

"Okay," Conrad said.

Colonel Primrose sat down.

"What's happened about my father?" she said quietly.

Colonel Primrose shook his head. "We're making some progress, Miss Pomeroy. It's slow work."

"You know, I've been trying so hard to think of anything that might help you."

"What about Mr. Givler and your father?"

She shook her head. "That's out. Jerome Givler couldn't possibly have had anything to do with it. You see, Dad himself used to say Jerome was the brains of the firm."

Colonel Primrose wondered if she realized, as apparently she did not, how little "out" that seemed to make Mr. Givler.

"Dad was the contact man. You'd be surprised to hear that Mr. Givler always did the criminal pleading, too. Dad used to say that if it hadn't been for his legs—they're terribly short—he could have been the greatest actor of the day. It's really incredible to see how juries do just anything he wants them to do."

"He never married?"

"No. I guess there was some sort of tragedy. I think he was in love with Mother."

"What about Mrs. Ellis?"

Anne Pomeroy looked away quickly.

"Oh, she's marvelous, isn't she? Men always fall for her like—" She looked up at him quickly. "Oh, I'm not jealous—at least, not very."

"You shouldn't be," Colonel Primrose said gently.

"Oh, I know. I'm being perfectly horrid. And she's swell. Do you know what she did?"

"What?"

"You know, she hasn't any money except what she makes. Well, Mr. Givler told us about Dad's will, and he's left her ten thousand dollars."

"Oh?" said Colonel Primrose. "She didn't tell me that."

"No, because she won't take it."

Colonel Primrose, who was very practical in such matters, would have put Hilda Ellis down as more practical still, and was very much surprised. "Why not?"

"That's what I wanted to know. She said it was a matter of principle. Dad wouldn't lend her money when she needed it badly, and now when she doesn't need it she won't take it. And she won't marry Mr. Givler, and he's got pots of money."

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"Do you know, Miss Pomeroy," he said, "whether there was any serious disagreement between your father and Mr. Herrick on Sunday evening?"

She nodded. "That was my fault."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"Oh, it's not anything, really. Only . . . I was a jealous little fool. You see, John was at our place in Connecticut this summer, and I thought he was swell, and I got Father to bring me down with him this time, because, well . . . John's been writing to me, and —oh, well, you see what I mean. Anyway, I was all wet, and when we got off the train and I introduced him to Hilda, he said, 'Not *the* Hilda Ellis!' and he didn't even *see* me. Then Hilda wasn't staying here, not until yesterday, and John just took charge of her. He was showing Hilda the town."

She tried to smile, without much luck. "And Dad found it out, because I was blubbering like an idiot."

Colonel Primrose watched her pleat and unpleat a handkerchief.

"It's funny how things work out, isn't it?" she said suddenly. "I never thought I'd marry Sterrett Conrad."

Colonel Primrose looked at her for a long time. "You're not going to marry Conrad," he said. "And you don't think, for a moment, that your cousin is really interested in John Herrick. She's not."

She shook her head. "You don't understand, Colonel Primrose," she said wistfully. "You see, Dad lost his head and practically told him he had to marry me to get in the firm. So of course John got mad and refused. He had to."

She turned her head to hide the quick, hot tears. "Oh, I wish Dad was here!" she cried suddenly, and crumpled into a wretched little heap at the end of the sofa.

Colonel Primrose hesitated a moment, then wandered over to the window and looked down on 16th Street. A bright pearl-gray hat was getting out of a familiar car. He waited for Buck to open the door and for Hilda Ellis to step out.

"There's no reason why I should stay in Washington, is there, Colonel Primrose?"

He turned. Anne Pomeroy was sitting up, the damage of a storm of tears repaired.

"None that I know of," he said. "I'll ask Captain Brady."

"I'd like to get back to New York. So much has happened. I think I almost wish we'd caught that plane that crashed."

"How did you miss it?" Colonel Primrose inquired casually.

"Oh, just an accident. Hilda got caught in a traffic jam on 42nd Street, and the time she took to get to a phone and tell us not to wait was just enough to save all three of us, as it turned out."

"Did Mr. Givler plan to come with you?"

"No. He won't fly. He thinks it's dangerous."

The door of the side bedroom opened and Hilda Ellis came in, smiling. "Guess who I saw sitting downstairs as if he didn't have a thing in the world to do?"

Colonel Primrose caught the quickening light in Anne's face, and saw it fade when Mrs. Ellis said, "Sterrett Conrad. He said he was waiting for Colonel Primrose to go, so he could see you again."

She smiled at Anne. "You ought to be nicer to him, darling. The breed's scarcer every year, from what I hear."

"Colonel Primrose says he thinks it'll be all right for us to go, Hilda," Anne said.

Colonel Primrose nodded. "I'll see Brady and phone you."

"He was here this morning," Mrs. Ellis said. "He asked us questions for an hour. Colonel, your Sergeant Buck has been wonderful. You don't want to sell him, do you? He's priceless."

"He is priceless," said Colonel Primrose. "No, Buck's more likely to be selling me some day."

He got up. "Thank you, Miss Pomeroy, for our talk. If you can leave here, when would you like to go?"

"Tomorrow."

"What train?"

"Oh, we'll fly, won't we, Hilda?"

"I'd rather, of course. There's a plane at noon from the Thompson Airdrome in Bladensburg."

As Colonel Primrose reached the door it opened, and John Herrick stood there. "Hello!" he said. Anne got up quickly.

"If you'll wait, Colonel Primrose, I'll go down with you. Sterrett's waiting in the lobby for me."

She ran into her bedroom.

Mrs. Ellis got quickly to her feet and picked up her gloves. "You wait here, John," she said coolly. "I'm going with Colonel Primrose myself."

Outside in the hall she smiled at him. "I can't bear for that

child to think I want her John," she said. "Do you mind?"

"Oh, not at all," Colonel Primrose said. "How about some lunch?"

"Elegant."

"Has Givler given you an explanation of his rather unusual conduct last night?" Colonel Primrose asked when the waiter had disappeared with their order.

She nodded. "He's very contrite, and he's going to reimburse you handsomely for any damage he did." She paused. "He's a curious man."

Colonel Primrose looked across the table into her dark eyes. The laughter had gone out of them. He saw a different woman behind them, keenly alive and shrewd.

"I understood him to say yesterday that when he left you at the Capitol on Sunday he wanted you to hear him opening the case?"

She nodded. "You see, he wasn't invited to the party, Sunday afternoon, but they let him in with Uncle and me. He stayed until it was almost over and then left. He didn't want to do the 'tour.' He's morbidly sensitive about walking around with people."

Colonel Primrose listened intently.

"Have you any idea why Pomeroy didn't let him open the case?"

She shook her head. "Except that Uncle always argued that sort of case. Givler's theatrical. That doesn't go in the Supreme Court."

Colonel Primrose smiled a little. "You know," he said, "as far as I can make out, the only other person who knew positively that Pomeroy was going to open was—John Herrick."

Mrs. Ellis was silent for a moment. She shook her head. "That's perfectly inconceivable, Colonel Primrose."

"It would certainly appear so," Colonel Primrose admitted cheerfully. "Well, what about Givler, then? Do you think he had any hand in Pomeroy's death?"

Mrs. Ellis stirred her coffee. Finally she shook her head. "I don't think so."

There was a little silence. Mrs. Ellis said, "You won't forget to find out from Captain Brady if we can go back?"

"I won't," said Colonel Primrose. "You'll fly up in the morning?"

"If my throat isn't worse. I've been gargling all day to catch it before it gets me down."

After he had put Mrs. Ellis on the elevator Colonel Primrose

went to a telephone booth, put in a call for Captain Brady, and made his request about Mrs. Ellis and Anne Pomeroy.

Captain Brady's voice came shockingly clear over the wire. Colonel Primrose listened calmly to at least thirty seconds of violent profanity.

"Yes!" said Captain Brady. "Listen, Colonel! You're the fourth person that's called me up in the last hour to ask that! Herrick, Conrad, and Givler. They can go whenever they feel like it! *It's okay with me!*"

"That's dandy," said Colonel Primrose. "I take it they really want to go."

Captain Brady's reply was unprintable.

"How are things going?"

"Rotten. They've found those pamphlets, though. Stacked in a pile in the basement. Coming over?"

"Right away, Brady. And maybe I'll tell you how Pomeroy was killed."

"That'll be great," said Captain Brady ironically. "Oh, wait a minute, Colonel. There's a call here from the Post Office. Anderson wants to see you. Army and Navy Club at two."

"Thanks," Colonel Primrose said. He pulled his watch out of his pocket. It was nearly quarter to two. Colonel Primrose got his overcoat and went out into 16th Street. Sergeant Buck stepped up.

"The car's here, sir."

"Good," said Colonel Primrose. "I wondered if you'd get back by this time."

Sergeant Buck had changed to his less striking raiment of gray tweeds.

"Let's go round to the club. Did you have a good time this morning?"

Sergeant Buck started the engine. "Yes, sir. I took her all over. Down on Pennsylvania Avenue to a Chinese place to get a present, and lots of other places. She got a thing she called a 'vawz' but it looked like a vase to me, sir. Wasn't big enough to hold anything, as I told her, but she just laughed. She's a mighty nice lady."

Buck's mahogany face corrugated with thought.

"If a man ever *was* to marry," he said tentatively, "that's the kind of a lady that wouldn't be no trouble in the house."

"You suggested that to her, Buck?"

"Not in them words." Sergeant Buck narrowly missed a taxi. "No, I just said you never married because you never found the right girl."

"Me?" said Colonel Primrose. He cocked his head and glared.

Sergeant Buck stared back in bewilderment. "Who else did you think, sir?" He jumped out to open the door.

Colonel Primrose went on into the club, found his friend, R. M. Anderson, postal inspector, in a corner of the bar, ordered two Scotch-and-sodas, and sat down by him. He felt rather like a balloon with the air sharply let out of it.

Anderson looked at him curiously. "I didn't want to call you, Colonel," he said. "But it seems you left word you wanted to hear about it as soon as the examination was finished."

"I did," said Colonel Primrose.

Anderson glanced around him.

"Following your report," he said quietly, "we continued investigation. You were right. There's no doubt the plane was blown up from the inside by an explosive in the mail compartment."

Colonel Primrose's black eyes shone.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"We're keeping it quiet. We're looking for a man known to have had a grudge against Gearing, the pilot. This fellow was fired, and Gearing got his job."

Colonel Primrose nodded abstractedly.

"I think you're wasting your time," he said after a moment.

Mr. Anderson finished his drink.

"So long."

Colonel Primrose did not answer. He sat in his chair staring for some minutes directly through a variety of very intimate friends who went by. It was nearly half-past three o'clock when he came to with a start and realized where he was. He scrambled hastily to his feet.

The hands of the gallery clock in the Supreme Court chamber stood at 4:30. The marshal struck the gavel down on his desk; the Court rose. Nine black-robed justices filed impressively out. The room emptied rapidly.

Captain Brady and Colonel Primrose came in the main entrance. They were talking earnestly. Behind them and above was Sergeant Buck's grim face.

"I can't tell you all of it till I'm absolutely certain," Colonel

Primrose was saying. "But these are the facts: the shooting of Pomeroy was the *second* attempt at his life. I *know* that to be true."

He stopped at the expression on Captain Brady's face.

"Now, Colonel!" Brady said. "I'm not that dumb. You think I don't know what you went up to New Jersey for, Thursday, or how you just happened to be in the Supreme Court here Monday morning? Why, you hadn't been in the Supreme Court for thirty years!"

Colonel Primrose's black old eyes sparkled. "Score one for you, Brady," he said. "Listen. That plane was blown up. It wasn't done to kill any pilot. It was done to kill Thomas Pomeroy. When it failed, this business here was set off. Mrs. Ellis got held up in a traffic jam, and was late calling up and telling them not to wait for her. They missed the plane, too. If Pomeroy had gone down in the plane..."

"Colonel," said Brady doggedly, "this doesn't make sense. Mrs. Ellis was in that plane too, as far as he knew. He didn't want to kill her. Look at the way he went to pieces last night, when he thought he'd done it."

Colonel Primrose continued to look down. He shook his head a little.

"You don't understand," he said. "We'll skip the business of Mrs. Ellis being on the plane, for the time being, and even the fact that General Block, whose help Mrs. Ellis had accepted after she'd turned Givler down, was on there too. Let's consider the rest of it. For instance, the shot he fired from my garden. Brady, that man's a trapshooter. He couldn't have missed at that distance."

Captain Brady stared. "But why, in heaven's name, Colonel?"

"Wait a minute. Let me point out to you the case against Jerome Givler. Givler tells one or two people that he was opening the case. Say that was nonsense. Mrs. Ellis told me that Pomeroy *always* argued such cases—Givler's forte was jury pleading. All right. Givler failed in his plot to kill Pomeroy by bombing the mail plane he was going to travel on. He then comes down here and rigs up his murder device in that gallery over your head. I'll tell you in a minute how that was really done."

"He then comes out and fires a revolver through my window, never planning to hit anybody. He goes to your office and gives himself up, with a cock-and-bull story of having killed Mrs. Ellis—*whom he doesn't really care about*. What are we going to

say about that? We're going to say just exactly what we did say. This couldn't be the man who rigged up that murder trap in the gallery. It isn't his temperament. He's a wild man, and so morbidly jealous of Hilda Ellis that he'll kill her just to see nobody else gets her.

"So, we're going to think just exactly what he wants us to think: that he did try to kill Mrs. Ellis, and that consequently he's certainly not the man who killed Thomas Pomeroy."

Captain Brady shook his head. "Listen, Colonel. I've questioned every living soul who was here Monday morning. I tell you that if Givler or anybody else tried to put that gun up there, he'd have been caught red-handed."

Colonel Primrose nodded. "You're right, as far as you go," he said simply. "You remember yesterday when we were here I said that to have fixed that gun up Monday morning, when everybody was about, verged on the impossible. *It was impossible.* It simply could not have been done. And the attaching of the gun to the clock had to be done after 12:45 at night. What does that leave us?"

Colonel Primrose smiled a little at the expression on Captain Brady's face.

"I'm not crazy," he said. "Look here. Sunday afternoon the Women's Defense League met under the dome to hand out tea and medals, and to make a tour of the Capitol. They visited the House, the Supreme Court, the Senate, the whole works. Pomeroy was here—Givler was not invited, but he was here just the same. And Givler left early."

"You don't mean—" Brady began.

Colonel Primrose nodded.

"I do mean," he said soberly. "And it's the only conceivable way it could have been done. The murderer came in here with that crowd of people on the tour of the Capitol. The murderer calmly waited until they were about to go, and stayed here. Stayed here behind those hangings, or behind the screen there, until they'd locked the doors. Stayed here, Brady, until 12:45 Monday morning. The murderer went up to the gallery, with all night to work in—and fixed up the revolver, the wires, and the weight."

"What about the knowledge of mechanics?"

Colonel Primrose looked curiously at him.

"It didn't take any very complicated knowledge of mechanics, for one thing. Any schoolboy could have done it. But let's go on.

The murderer waits until morning—and the court attendants begin to roam about in here. Then it's easy to step out, with those pamphlets picked up from the gallery landing, and just walk out of the chamber."

It was at that moment that the messenger appeared in the marshal's door.

"Telephone, sir," he said to Brady. "Mr. Hansen."

"He's the guy I've got watching Givler," Brady said. He strode through the door into the marshal's office. Colonel Primrose and Buck followed. Brady put down the phone without having said a word.

"Lost him twenty minutes ago," he said.

"Let's get over to the Ritz," Colonel Primrose said.

Colonel Primrose stepped out of the elevator and ran as fast as his knee allowed to the door of the Pomeroy suite. The door was ajar and the room empty. He went quickly across to the bedroom door. A maid was making the bed.

"Where's Mrs. Ellis?" he said.

The maid stared stupidly. "You mean the lady that was here? She's gone."

He turned back to Captain Brady. "Call the desk," he said curtly. "Find out when they left and where they've gone."

He went into the bathroom. The maid had flung the used towels in a heap by the door. A little pile of débris was swept up beside them: a cardboard box that a tube of toothpaste had come in, a drug-store carton of potassium chlorate, with typed directions to gargle twice daily.

Colonel Primrose turned without a word and went back.

Brady put down the phone. "They checked out half an hour ago," he said. "They got tickets on the five o'clock plane from Bladensburg."

Colonel Primrose reached for the telephone with his left hand and for his watch with his right. A bell somewhere struck five.

"Connect me with the Thompson Airdrome, Bladensburg," he said. "Hurry, please! This is a matter of life or death."

Sergeant Buck spoke crisply, his hand on the door. "Shall I get the car, sir?"

"No. Get on another phone and get a police car. Hello!"

"Thompson Airdrome—good evening."

Behind and beyond the young woman's voice speaking to him

Colonel Primrose could hear the roar of a plane.

"*Stop the five o'clock plane!*" he said. His voice was cold with command and urgency. "*Police Department speaking!*"

The languid voice changed instantly, "Sorry—it's just taken off."

"Order it back. *It's got to be stopped! This is a matter of life or death!*"

"Right. I'll get in touch at once."

The phone clicked. Colonel Primrose put down the receiver. Brady appeared in the door. "The car'll be here in two minutes, Colonel," he said.

Colonel Primrose started toward the door. He came back quickly and took up the receiver.

"Thompson Airdrome again," he said. "Quick! . . . Hello! Thompson Airdrome? Police Department speaking. Have your fastest plane ready to take off."

He turned to Brady.

"The radio will be disconnected," he said. "Hurry up, man."

Colonel Primrose will never forget that ride through the streets of Washington, swarming with the hordes of government employees on their way home from work, or the speed and precision of the traffic police clearing the way as the black car hurtled along the empty gray ribbon between crowds, the siren screaming. The speedometer reached 60 as they came out of Mount Vernon Place into New York Avenue, and 80 as they tore through the red light on Florida Avenue and onto the Viaduct. And always the radio on the dashboard sounded its even note of warning:

"Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Clear all traffic New York Avenue, Maryland Avenue, to Thompson Avenue."

They turned into Maryland Avenue at 70 miles an hour and went under the bridge at 90; past orange stalls into Cottage City. As they came to a great white cross where the road turned, the speedometer stood at 97.

"Calling all cars. Calling all cars. Resume normal traffic."

They turned into the airfield and came to a grinding stop ten feet from a small plane with its engine roaring. It was an army pursuit plane, two-seater, open cockpit. The pilot in it waved a hand and shouted something no one could hear. From somewhere Colonel Primrose could hear a woman screaming at him as he clambered up behind the pilot. He caught the word "Radio," but he had known that the radio would not work. The plane moved

slowly, then faster, then hurtled along the grass and rose with a long zooming flow into the air.

Colonel Primrose fastened the belt around him and took up the charting board at his feet. He turned it to the blackboard side, took the piece of white chalk from the holder between the boards, and printed in as large letters as he could:

DUMP THE MAIL! QUICK! POLICE!!!

He held it on his lap and shouted at the pilot, "How fast can we go?"

The pilot turned and grinned.

"Two-twenty-five!" he roared back. "They're making a hundred and fifty."

Colonel Primrose sat quietly. He closed his eyes. "Save her!" he said. "God help me to save her!"

The minutes dragged. The needle on the dashboard moved steadily up: 200; 215. The needle found its mark: 225.

The pilot turned. "Twenty minutes more!" he roared.

Colonel Primrose closed his eyes again. He had waited for the zero hour before, with Sergeant Buck not far away; but never at a time of more wanton slaughter than now. Anne Pomeroy's face kept coming before him... and Hilda Ellis'. They were flying peacefully, having tea possibly, or reading, never dreaming that suddenly, and at what time Colonel Primrose did not know, death would burst on them and their plane would go hurtling, shattered, a living spear of fire, down toward the earth.

The pilot shouted something. Colonel Primrose opened his eyes. Somewhere ahead of him was a tiny red glow on a tiny dark spot; and while he drew a deep, bursting breath they gained on it. Faster.

Colonel Primrose grasped his board firmly. The tiny plane roared. They were close now, and in an instant they had come up alongside, twenty feet distant. Colonel Primrose waved one hand, as he held up his board and shouted, knowing well that in the roar of those great engines forty men could have shouted unheard. Then they were past, far into space, banking.

Colonel Primrose's pilot turned back. "She's slowing up!" he roared. A wave of relief so great that it was almost nauseating swept over Colonel Primrose. They were coming together again.

"*Dump the mail!*" Colonel Primrose shouted. Then he remembered and raised his blackboard, waving his hand.

He could see the staring face of the pilot now. The plane sheered

off, turned, banked; and he shouted with joy. The mail plane was slowly turning, circling back toward them.

As he looked, peering into the growing dusk, his heart a cold, leaden weight, the last scene in the grisly tragedy of murder in the Thomas Pomeroy family took place. His eyes were on the plane banking, circling—cruelly slow—back toward them.

As he gazed, praying desperately that her pilot would understand before it was too late, a dark hole appeared sharply in the silver surface of the plane. The door of the after compartment had opened. A figure which Colonel Primrose could hardly see stood there for an instant, coolly poised, then leaped out and plunged down toward the earth.

Colonel Primrose stared, fascinated and helpless, down at the dark figure on its mad, hurtling rush toward the ground. As he did so, a tiny white cloud suddenly appeared above it and spread slowly out into a glistening white circle. The hurtling rush stopped. Colonel Primrose knew that he was looking down on a parachute, and that under it, shielded from his sight, the murderer of Thomas Pomeroy was gliding safely to the ground.

The two planes, the great silver passenger ship and the tiny dragonfly pursuit plane, were side by side again. Colonel Primrose held out his message, shouting, gesticulating. The pilot waved his hand. Colonel Primrose saw the great passenger ship lurch and the shining bottom of the nose fall open. Two striped mailbags plunged out and shot down into space.

Colonel Primrose put the charting board carefully down, leaned back for an instant, and wiped the freezing sweat from his forehead. He leaned over and peered down again. He spotted the white cloud of the parachute, sailing lazily down.

Suddenly he gripped the cockpit and leaned hastily out. It had just come to his mind, intent before on getting the mailbags out before this plane met the same fate as the other one, that the great plane had circled far back after the parachute jumper had left it. He peered down through the beginning dusk. Near the white cloud, almost directly over it, two black specks, revolving, plunged steadily downward; and then, while he stared fascinated, one of the black specks disappeared.

Far down in space, where it had been an instant before, he could see the flash of the explosion that had torn the mailbag to invisible bits. At the same instant the delicate, floating white cloud of the parachute, torn and shredded by flying fragments

rom the detonation, streamed up toward him in a thin, useless  
ine. And Hilda Ellis hurtled down, with increasing and relentless  
peed, to destruction.

Captain Brady and Sergeant Buck stood looking into the fire.  
ohn Herrick, sitting on the sofa, looked silently down at the  
loor. Colonel Primrose, wrapped in a llama-wool bathrobe, sipped  
hot toddy in front of the fire in his library.

"*But you said it was Givler!*" Brady said.

Colonel Primrose shook his head.

"No," he said. "You said it was Givler. I thought it might be  
Hilda Ellis from the first—or almost. Then I became pretty cer-  
ain it was she, and when we went to the hotel I knew it was. She  
was too much in the picture from the beginning. The delay in  
New York, for instance, so that she couldn't possibly have caught  
the plane, while Pomeroy and Anne missed it by the skin of their  
eeth. I wondered about that the first time I heard it."

"Then everything fitted in. The familiarity with the Supreme  
Court, for instance. She'd not only been there with Herrick con-  
stantly for three days, but she'd spent hours—centuries, she  
aid—sitting in the chamber listening to her father, no doubt  
taring up at that gallery clock. Then the knowlédge of electricity  
and mechanics, the nerve and daring—she had all that. Givler  
didn't have it. No one else in the picture had. The knowledge, too,  
that Givler would never in the world open such a case, and wasn't  
going to. She even told me that herself."

"Then the other points. Why was the murder committed in the  
Supreme Court? Simply because everything pointed to somebody  
who had a vast familiarity with the Court and was well known  
here—as I thought for a while myself; and Hilda Ellis had no  
lightest connection with it. I suddenly realized that that could be  
the answer there, before I'd met her."

"And the pamphlets, too. The murderer carried them out, not  
because she was well known there, but because she wasn't known  
it all. Yet her face was vaguely familiar, at least, to nearly  
everybody. Hence, with the pamphlets, nearly everyone was likely  
ust to think she was somebody else's secretary that he'd seen doz-  
ons of times.

"Well, I gave you a true account, Brady, of how it was done  
—only, it was Mrs. Ellis who dropped out of the tour of the  
Capitol and stayed in the Supreme Court room, and not Givler."

She waited in the chamber until it was locked up. She had the necessary stuff in her handbag. She carries an unusually large one. A woman's bag is even less noticeable than a lawyer's brief case. No one missed her that night because she was staying alone in a hotel. She didn't move to the Ritz until the next day."

Captain Brady shook his head. "I still don't see how you go onto it, Colonel."

Colonel Primrose did not answer for some time. "It was all these points together," he said then. "And Buck's gallantry helped."

He cocked his head and smiled up at the stiff-backed figure standing at attention against the hall door. Sergeant Buck's face turned red.

"Buck told me he'd taken her, among other places, to one of those Oriental bazaars down on Pennsylvania Avenue. She bought a small vase as a gift for someone. I wondered at the time about that, having it already in my mind that Mrs. Ellis had been doing some queer things. That seemed a very strange thing to do. It's not the sort of gift you'd think she'd get for anybody, and she was just going to New York, where they have very elaborate shops. Well, there's always one thing you do with that sort of vase, and that's what she wanted it for.

"When I saw the rooms she had just left, when she'd got Ann Pomeroy to take an earlier plane so they wouldn't be stopped, knew it was a matter of life or death to stop that plane. On the floor was an empty packet of potassium chlorate. It had direction on it for use as a gargle. She'd told me she had a sore throat, and that was another point, for I remembered thinking at the time how well she looked. At that time, also, for some reason or another, it flashed into my mind that I'd heard her say, the first time I saw her, that she was the only child of Pomeroy's only brother.

"Potassium chlorate isn't used much as a gargle nowadays, though you can buy it at any drug store. But if you powder it up and mix it with a little powdered sulphur, or some red phosphorous, you've got a mighty dangerous explosive; and if you then pack your mixture gently in a good, stout vase, put a resistance wire through it, plug the vase with a wooden plug, connect up the wire with a cell and a clock so that the hands complete a circuit when you want it . . ."

Colonel Primrose sipped his toddy.

"It was all neat and simple. All she had to do was wrap it up and mail it at three o'clock marked for the five o'clock plane. There wasn't a chance in the world of anything going wrong. Then all she had to do was get on the plane with those other doomed passengers and wait. At the right time she went to the washroom, put on the parachute she'd brought in her overnight bag, and just jumped out.

"When the plane crashed, she could simply say she'd warned the pilot that the engines were missing, or something of the sort. What could anybody prove to the contrary? And for a woman of her training to throw the radio off was child's play. I've no doubt she went into the cockpit, as one flyer to another, and simply slipped one hand under the dash and disconnected a terminal. It wouldn't be noticed immediately."

John Herrick got up suddenly. "But why did she do it?"

"She did it for eight hundred thousand dollars, free of encumbrance," said Colonel Primrose. "If Thomas and Anne Pomeroy died, Mrs. Ellis was next in line to inherit."

"But she'd refused ten thousand!"

"She could well afford to. Ten thousand was nothing to what she was playing for, but that was a very bad mistake. That was one of the chief things I wondered about. She needed money badly for her Tokyo flight. Several people told me that General Block was backing her, but I fancy she was the one who told them that. According to Mrs. Pettijohn, Block was more interested in women than in women flyers. Anyway, Block was dead—I imagine it was accidental; he just happened to be on that plane."

"So I couldn't see any good reason for Mrs. Ellis' not taking that ten thousand—except as a blind."

"Well, that's it," he said. "When she jumped, the plane was circling back to see what it was all about, and they cut it mighty fine as far as dumping the mail was concerned. When they finally got the idea and did dump it, the mail went down faster than *she* was going, of course, with that parachute."

"The plane had circled back somewhere above her, and the bomb just went off too close. They found a little jagged bit of the vase caught in the parachute, and other bits must have gone through it. You know, only one rent in a parachute is plenty. The air just rips it open."

Sergeant Buck shook his head.

"That's fate, sir," he said solemnly.

Captain Brady shook his head too. "But what about Givler?" "Givler?" Colonel Primrose said. "Givler hated Pomeroy, and he was—is—madly in love with Hilda Ellis. When he shot at her, he really wanted to kill her rather than see her in love with another man. And he missed, probably, because of nerves. He was just about insane with jealousy."

Captain Brady got up, put on his overcoat, and took his hat. "Well," he said gruffly, "it all goes to show you never can tell. Colonel, this is another one up for you."

As Sergeant Buck went out into the hall with him the telephone rang. Colonel Primrose took down the receiver.

"Hello," he said. "Yes, Colonel Primrose speaking. Oh, hello! You got through all right?... Sorry it had to happen that way. I hope it wasn't too big a shock. Yes, certainly I'll give him a message—but why don't you give it to him yourself? He's right here."

He handed the receiver to John Herrick.

Colonel Primrose watched his face with a little twinkle.

"Oh, Anne!" he said. "Darling! Where are you? Anne, can you—will you forgive me? I love you! I... What? Yes! Yes! Anne, wait a minute—make it Philadelphia, it's closer! Goodbye, darling!"

Colonel Primrose sat back in his chair. Sergeant Buck came in. "Somebody left the front door open," he said.

"That was Herrick," Colonel Primrose said. "I fancy he was in a hurry."

"I was just telling Judge Adams next door about Pomeroy," Sergeant Buck remarked. "All he said was, he guessed it wouldn't be the first time they'd got away with murder in the Supreme Court."



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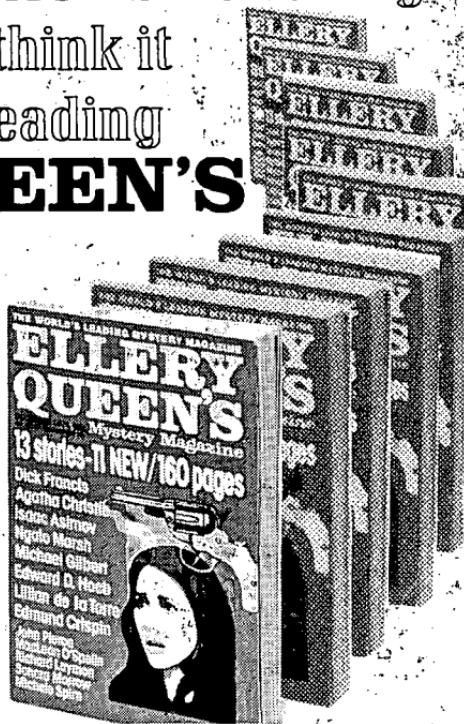
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